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THE MODERN RELIGIOUS SITUATION

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THE MODERN RELIGIOUS SITUATION

BY THE REV.
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PREFACE

THE lectures incorporated in this book were originally delivered to the "Summer School of Theology" which is annually held in connection with Parkin College, Adelaide. They were mainly intended to help students for the Christian Ministry, but ordained ministers and lay people attended in considerable numbers. The appreciation then expressed led me to think that the lectures might be useful to a wider constituency. I have revised the lectures, but have not seriously modified their form; they retain much of the free conversational form of their original delivery. Footnotes and references have been deliberately excluded. I have sought to deal frankly and fearlessly with outstanding modern "difficulties" in the way of Christian faith: if any perplexed spirits are helped in the search for truth by what I have written, I shall be sufficiently

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rewarded. It is hardly necessary to add that considerations of time and space account for the fact that the treatment of most of the subjects under discussion is meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

E. S. K.

A FOREWORD

"GOOD wine needs no bush," and no words of mine are necessary to commend this little book to any who know the quality of its author. Those of us who were privileged to be his fellow-students and fellow-workers (in the widest sense) while he was with us in Staffordshire and Yorkshire know that Australia's gain has been our loss. The range and accuracy of his learning, especially in the field of history—sacred and secular so-called—the vividness of his personality, the incisiveness of his judgments, and the candour and glow of his piety, have endeared him to all who have come within his ambit in both northern and southern hemispheres.

It has been a pleasure to see these pages through the press, a labour made light not only by the love I bear him, but by the careful way in which his MS. was prepared,

the skilled and intelligent co-operation of printers and publishers, and the twofold experience of his father—Mr. Sidney Kiek.

It is an excellent thing that those who first heard these lectures should have the opportunity of possessing them in permanent form, and that others, both in the land of his adoption and of his birth should share the privilege. The diagnosis of the situation strikes me as very sound, and it is a great advantage to have these "difficulties" brought together in this way and stated so lucidly, even if they are not wholly removed. Principal Kiek would be the last to say that he had solved all our perplexities, but it is half the battle to have them stated clearly, and to strip them of the fog and mist with which many people find them surrounded. And I am sure that he will bring help and guidance to all who carefully follow his investigation and adopt his methods. Here and there he may seem trenchant, but his pruning is only that there may be more fruit; he does not remove the old so much as emphasize the true and the essential; in emptying the bath he does not throw out the baby. His last chapter has a value all its own, and I should like to see it

getting home. But from first to last there is cogency, appositeness, and the will of a man of God to serve his generation in sincerity, in truth, and in love.

ALEX. J. GRIEVE.

LANCASHIRE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE,
MANCHESTER, 15*th September* 1926.

P.S.—A note may be added with reference to p. 130 (2). The whole question has recently been gone into afresh by the Rev. P. Gardner-Smith in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, for January 1926. He comes to the conclusion that the opening words of Matt. xxviii. 1, "late on the Sabbath day," and the whole of Luke xxiii. 54, should be omitted. His reasoning seems convincing to me, but it is difficult to summarize, and I content myself with calling attention to it as a good solution of the difficulty.

A. J. G.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD, BY PRINCIPAL ALEXANDER GRIEVE	vii
I. THE MODERN SITUATION—A REVIEW .	1
II. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD	23
III. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT PRAYER	43
IV. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC	64
V. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE VIRGIN BIRTH	85
VI. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE RESURRECTION	126
VII. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE ATONEMENT	146
VIII. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE FUTURE LIFE	167
IX. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE CHURCH	183
X. MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE MINISTRY	197
INDEX	215

THE MODERN RELIGIOUS SITUATION

I

THE MODERN SITUATION—GENERAL REVIEW

BEFORE we proceed to the discussion of the specific "modern difficulties" referred to in the syllabus, it seems advisable to envisage the situation out of which they arise. The way of Christian faith has never been without its perplexities and anxieties: one may doubt whether the "unrest" of the twentieth century is any greater than the unrest of the second, or the sixteenth, or the eighteenth. History has seen many upheavals and revolutions, and every one of them has had a reaction on the intellectual and spiritual life of the world. Christianity has passed through not a few periods of change and perplexity; its form has altered again and again. The

Church had to face at the very beginning the question of the relation between Christianity and the Jewish Law: the Pauline teaching and the success of the Gentile mission created a type of Christianity that the primitive believers might have had some difficulty in recognizing, and that some of them actually repudiated. Scarcely had this controversy been settled when the Church was faced with the necessity of defining the relation between the Gospel and the world of Greek thought, which resulted in discussions and debates lasting for centuries, and in the evolution of creeds and dogmas that seem at first sight very remote from the simplicity of the primitive faith, and that presented grave perplexities to many conservatively minded believers. Another crisis came with the Reformation, and yet another with the rise of Deism in the eighteenth century. So one might go on.

Religious unrest is therefore a common characteristic of every period of change. Yet it is true that history never repeats itself, and the present situation may fairly be pronounced unique. The last sixty years has been a period which combines unexampled progress with unexampled disintegration. Never since the

second century has Christianity been subjected to so severe and voluminous a criticism, reaching even to the very fundamentals of the faith. From the age of the Œcumenical Councils down to the nineteenth century there was any amount of religious controversy, and there were periods of acute religious strife (especially in the sixteenth century), but neither controversy nor strife touched the central articles of faith. In every age we may doubtless find evidences of sin and unbelief, but it is only comparatively recently that Christendom has been faced with a reasoned and insistent, often a very earnest and pathetic, demand for a new definition of the fundamentals of Christianity, accompanied by a denial that many of the so-called "fundamentals" are really fundamentals at all.

I need hardly say that this is a situation that requires the closest attention on the part of all teachers of Christian truth. It is useless to bury our heads in the sand or to cry "Peace" where there is no peace. It is even more useless to content ourselves with hurling anathemas at those whom we please to call "infidels" or to spend our time in bewailing

the indifference of the masses and the hostility of the "intellectuals." Rather must we boldly analyse the modern situation, face its difficulties, and even prepare ourselves for such restatement of the everlasting Gospel as may be called for by loyalty to Him Who is the only Revealer of truth. How far such restatement may go, and what form it should take, are matters to be settled, not by bigoted clamour on the one hand nor by reckless iconoclasm on the other, but in a spirit of soberness, charity and prayer. No one individual can do more than offer a very modest contribution to the total result, and many difficult problems may have to wait for solution pending the advent of fuller knowledge and new revelations of the ever-working Spirit of God.

At the same time, I would strongly insist on the urgent need for hard thinking and fearless speaking. The idea is widespread that Christianity is intellectually discredited and even bankrupt. I believe this idea to be entirely erroneous, so far as concerns the *real* Gospel of Jesus Christ, but it is not altogether erroneous so far as certain *presentations* of

that Gospel are concerned. The need for distinguishing between the "kernel" and the "husk" of Religion was never more clamant than to-day. The development of popular education and the diffusion of what is called modern knowledge has created inside our churches and out of them a class of people whose doubts and difficulties need to be sympathetically met and wisely dealt with. It is quite right to say that the appeal of the Gospel is not, and ought not to be, primarily an intellectual appeal to intellectual people. At the same time, intellectual people need the Gospel just as much as the thoughtless and the ignorant, and in any case intellectual doubts and difficulties may present an insuperable barrier to the appeal we make to sentiment, conscience and will. We want "the Spirit and the understanding also," to serve God with the whole mind as well as with the whole heart. Therefore I plead for a development of good apologetic preaching, if many of our people, especially our young people, are to be saved from the blighting effects of materialism and scepticism. This means hard study, but we dare not shrink. It is useless to talk pious commonplaces or

fervent rhetoric to folks who are dubious about our very presuppositions. Neither the amiable essayist nor the unamiable dogmatist can meet the needs of the modern situation: the former does nothing in particular, and the latter does a lot of harm. But the preacher who faces the worst, and yet can show good reason for believing in the best, will never lack for an audience.

I

First of all, let us face the fact that the modern situation has been largely determined by the amazing progress of scientific discovery, and the application of these discoveries to the realm of everyday life. On the details of this development I have no time to dilate: they are well enough known to every educated and observant man. Civilization has been transformed; wealth has been multiplied; comfort has been increased; above all, the outlook of men has been revolutionized. By revealing the vastness of the Universe, Science has made man seem strangely insignificant—a mere ant surrounded by resistless forces and over-arched by thronging worlds. By en-

abling man to harness the powers of Nature for his own purposes, Science has endowed him with the potencies that in former ages would have seemed conceivable only to an apocalyptic imagination. In an age of Science a geo-centric and anthropocentric religion has seemed an anomaly—a mere survival of pre-scientific superstition; in this sense Science seems to humble and even to abuse the creature whom Religion would fain exalt. But at the same time, Science has performed miracles that any previous generation would have pronounced supernatural: it has opened a new and marvellous way that leads to a new earth, a material environment not so much improved as revolutionized. Is it wonderful that people have become obsessed with materialistic ideas, in an age when material changes have been so many, so impressive, and so manifestly fruitful? Science has done so much that it might seem as though Science might do everything; has solved so many problems that it might seem as though no problem were incapable of solution in terms of matter and energy. The vision of the universal reign of Law appears to make God a superfluity and even Freedom an illusion.

The most important event in the history of this development was probably the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and the promulgation in a modern and scientific form of the ancient hypothesis of Evolution. Darwin's views have, of course, been modified in the course of discussion, notably by Weissmann, but the main outlines of his doctrine may fairly be regarded as established. Not only Science, but Philosophy and History, and even Theology, have been largely dominated by the evolutionary hypothesis. Nor can it be doubted that many evolutionists have regarded Evolution as eliminating all need for Teleology: instead of treating Evolution as a theory of method, they have preached it as a sufficient explanation of the mingled unity and diversity of the world we see. On the other hand, some theologians have seriously compromised the cause of Religion by representing Christianity as bound up with the Biblical cosmogony and the theory of "special creation." In this way they have played into the hands of the enemy and caused Religion to be associated in the minds of many with blind and bigoted opposition to the progress of scientific thought. It cannot too earnestly

be insisted on that the question of Evolution is in itself a purely scientific question, to be determined by scientific investigation alone, and that the irreligious interpretation of the evolutionary process is neither inevitable nor even justifiable. The more wonderful the process, the surer we may be that God is in it, and that no merely mechanical view of its origin and character can possibly hold good. This truth is realized by leading scientists, philosophers and theologians; unfortunately the popular mind is often obsessed by materialistic interpretations of Evolution, to the great detriment of Religion, and this is a very real factor in the present situation.

Secondly, we must take into account the problems created by the literary and historical criticism of the Bible. It is, of course, an error to imagine that the progress of criticism has been dominated by an irreligious spirit, or that its results have been exclusively negative and destructive. This idea is simply a product of misunderstanding and prejudice, encouraged by rationalistic pamphleteers on the one hand, and by religious obscurantists on the other. Certainly, modern investigation has

destroyed the theory of "verbal inspiration"; but the Church has never been officially committed to this doctrine, which had its rise among the Jewish Rabbis, and its fullest development in the degenerate Protestant theology of the seventeenth century. The worth of the Bible as the record of a unique revelation of God, none the less unique because progressive, is entirely independent of this crude and outworn theory of its composition. Further, it is perfectly true that in many cases investigation has rendered dubious or untenable traditional views regarding the date, authorship, and character of certain of the Biblical writings. Here, again, it ought surely to be obvious that the actual inspirational value of these writings is something that is "spiritually discerned" and is quite independent of any conclusions we may reach in connection with literary and historical problems. Indeed, the modern view of the Bible actually removes many of the difficulties which arise in minds accustomed to regard all parts of the Bible as equally inspired and authoritative and to interpret everything in a crudely literal and prosaic fashion. The Bible is to be tested by Christ: whatever in the Bible is really and

truly Christian is for us to receive, apply, and assimilate: the rest we can relegate to a secondary place as part of a spiritual development that in Christ has been fulfilled and transcended. Here again we must face the fact that the popular mind suffers from most hazy and distorted notions regarding both the method and the results of modern criticism. It is widely believed that the Bible has ceased to be in any sense inspired and authoritative, that its teachings are altogether discredited, and that even the Gospel histories are little better than tissues of legend. Intelligent instruction regarding these matters is urgently needed, if many of our people are to be delivered from the confusion and perplexity in which they now are.

Thirdly, I must make reference to the difficulties created by the social movements of the past sixty years. There has been an increasing revolt against a system individualistic in spirit and capitalistic in its form of organization, accompanied by a demand for the reconstruction of life on co-operative and more or less communistic lines. This revolt is partly economic and political, but its roots are really

moral. Rightly or wrongly, it is believed that the present system is radically unjust, and that in many of its aspects it constitutes an affront to the sacredness of personality, inasmuch as it treats persons not as persons, but as instruments, and sacrifices life to the interests of wealth. Of course, I know that the case has often been exaggerated, and that the spirit of revolt has often assumed forms that seem very objectionable. But the point I want to stress is, that the popular mind has come to associate the Church and even Christianity itself with a merely conservative attitude in regard to social problems. We are charged with "doping" the workers by preaching the virtues of meekness and obedience, the duty of submission to the will of God, and the realization of blessedness in the Beyond rather than here and now. We are said to be "under the thumb" of the rich profiteers and afraid to speak out because to do so would mean trouble and loss. Religion is often represented as altogether hostile to the just claims of Labour. Marxian Socialism is frankly materialistic: it admits no spiritual factors into its analysis of history, and aims simply and solely at material changes of one

kind or another. In Europe, Socialism is almost invariably bitterly anti-religious, and the same is true in a less degree in England, Australia, and elsewhere. How far the Churches are to blame for this situation, I will not say: my purpose is simply to insist on the truth that this is one explanation of the difficulties with which we are confronted. A large section of people look on religion as simply a dangerous form of capitalistic "dope," and are predisposed to believe any teaching which represents Christianity as obsolete and discredited.

II

Hitherto I have been dwelling on features of the modern situation which make for perplexity and often for discouragement. But there are other factors to be considered—factors which make for a more optimistic view—factors which should inspire us with new confidence in our Christian advocacy. I do not speak of that deep-rooted instinct for religion which belongs to man, and which bears witness to his spiritual nature and destiny—an instinct which may be starved and repressed, but is nevertheless bound to

assert itself sooner or later, which even now is asserting itself in all kinds of strange ways. Nor do I speak of the permanence of Christ's appeal to human longings and needs, of His perennial power to satisfy the deepest yearnings of the soul. Rather do I want to speak of certain special characteristics of the present intellectual and social outlook which indicate the probability, and even the certainty, of a new revival of Christian faith and life. I wish to suggest that the environment is becoming more favourable, that the breath of spring is in the air, that thoughtful people are getting ready for a more sympathetic attitude towards the fundamentals of the faith.

Firstly, let me direct attention to recent movements in Philosophy and Science, in so far as Science bears on Philosophy. The most obvious feature in the situation is the utter collapse of those materialistic interpretations which enjoyed such widespread acceptance in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Professor James Ward, in his famous Gifford Lectures on *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, has for ever demolished the dog-

matic presuppositions on which these interpretations were built. In America we have the late William James and Josiah Royce; in France, Henri Bergson; and in Germany, Rudolf Eucken—all representing influential movements in modern Philosophy, and differing considerably in their view of the world, but all agreed in regarding Materialism as quite impossible. It is clear that the world cannot be successfully interpreted on the theory that mind is mere by-product of matter, while Clifford's famous epigram, that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile," has passed into the realm of the ridiculous. On the purely scientific side the whole drift of investigation is in the direction of resolving Matter into a form of Motion and of recognizing that no mechanical evolution can explain the world that now is, much less explain itself. The very categories of Science seem disintegrating under the examination of scientists themselves: one need only mention Kelvin, Lodge, and Einstein. Materialism, so far from accounting for Mind, is now regarded as incapable of accounting for Matter, even on the assumption that we know what Matter is—which we do not. Evolution, so

far from eliminating creative activity, is now seen to involve it, and that at every point: so far from eliminating Teleology it provides Teleology with a vast mass of data previously unknown. Finally, we have Psychology revealing new potentialities in the life of the soul, with its recognition of the "subliminal self" and its theories of telepathy, multiplex personality, etc. Miracles of healing that once seemed incredible are now considered well within the range of scientific investigation; intercessory prayer has found a scientific validation; conversion is now a subject of sympathetic inquiry; the arguments for the survival of personality beyond bodily death have received unexpected reinforcement. "Rationalist" lecturers are living on out-of-date philosophy and out-of-date science: as the more recent teachings percolate down to the multitudes we shall surely find a change in their outlook towards Religion. The new Science and the new Philosophy cannot, of course, be reckoned as substitutes for Christianity, but at least we can say they clear the way for Christianity, and prepare the educated public for a more sympathetic reception of evangelical truth.

Secondly, we are beginning to see that the newer views of the Bible, so far from discrediting the historical foundations of Christianity, have vindicated most remarkably the claims of Jesus Christ on the reverence and allegiance of mankind. The uniqueness of the religious evolution portrayed in the Old Testament becomes clearer as we gain a sounder view of its chronology and understand more of the religions of the Semitic peoples. The facts, taken as a whole, are not susceptible of a simply naturalistic interpretation. Especially may we be grateful for the light thrown on the obscure period "Between the Testaments" by the studies of men like R. H. Charles in apocryphal and apocalyptic literature, and on the language of the New Testament by the studies of men like Deissmann in the papyri. These researches have illumined many dark places in the New Testament. I can only allude to one or two points. Firstly, we know now that there is no possible doubt as to the transcendent character of the Messiahship which Jesus claimed for Himself and the Apostles claimed for Him: such a claim could spring only from a transcendent Self-Consciousness, unless indeed from an insane egot-

ism. Secondly, we can now draw a fairly clear distinction between what we may call the conventional elements in the framework of Jesus' teaching and the Apostolic preaching, and the new elements which emerged from the experience of Jesus Himself and from the experience of the early communities. The pictures of Jesus drawn by nineteenth-century Rationalism are now seen to be inadequate to the facts, and the rival Christ-Myth theory is equally eliminated. The Higher Criticism cannot, of course, provide us with a Christology, but it does exhibit the need of one by revealing in Jesus a Personality that stands out as altogether unique, transcending all the past and at the same time commanding the future—a Personality challenging the utmost of our thought even as it challenges the utmost of our love.

Thirdly, we are face to face in the social sphere with the failure alike of individualism and socialism to minister to the diseases of the body politic. The brutalities of the capitalist have been rivalled and surpassed by the brutalities of the communist. State ownership of the means of production, distribution,

and exchange is now seen to be no panacea for human ills; the most advanced reformers are eager to disown experiments in bureaucracy of this kind. All the talk now is about self-government in industry, working through industrial guilds, though how the conflicting interests of the different guilds are to be effectually reconciled is by no means clear. The advance of Trade Unionism and the vigorous activities of the Labour Party in politics have doubtless mitigated many of the evils of the past, but they have raised other problems no less perplexing. Above all, we see increasingly that the root of all social disease is to be found in that selfish and grasping spirit which is the monopoly of no party or class, and which operates with impartial fatality in any scheme of society that the wit of man can devise. The war revealed the essential paganism latent beneath the veneer of European culture and civilization; nor is there any convincing evidence that the horrors and losses of war have acted as a purging influence.

Behind the problem of Reconstruction looms the larger and more vital problem of the moral and spiritual Regeneration of mankind. We

see now that it is easier for the world to become a *neighbourhood* than for mankind to become a *brotherhood*: it is easier to harness the powers of nature than to subdue the evil impulses that lurk in the soul of man; it is easier to overthrow political and social systems than to change the motives that dominate human conduct. Everywhere there is a sense of disappointment and disillusion: the men of valour and the men of wisdom shrink appalled from situations where neither valour nor skill can serve. The obvious need of the age is not for more agitators or more legislators, not for more cranks or more critics, but for more apostles and more prophets. In the very extremity of man's need is the opportunity of God's Gospel. The new situation, confused and menacing as it is, must pass into deeper and deeper tragedy unless a spirit is evoked that will heal the wounds of the nations and unite the sundered classes into a real community. Altruism, as Kidd long ago pointed out, is only regnant where Religion lends it a supernatural sanction: the supreme motives of morality draw their authority from the region of the Unseen. Society cannot be held together by the lath and plaster of

self-interest: "patriotism is not enough"; humanitarianism is not enough; communism by coercion is a mixture of comedy and tragedy. If history demonstrates anything it demonstrates that Religion is the one enduring social bond, and in the religion of Jesus reside the principles and the power which alone can create the true commonwealth. The situation is such that no one can be an optimist who is not either a Christian or a fool. As Christians we should see in the failure of an unchristian civilization the fulfilment of prophecy and the vindication of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus—a clarion call to renewed ministry in the Gospel, the Gospel which alone is the power of God unto salvation.

The present situation is simply a demonstration on a vast scale that Materialism is bankrupt. It denies the possibility of any salvation in the world beyond, and at the same time is incapable of securing the salvation of the world that now is. It is intellectually discredited and empirically disastrous. Over against it stands Christianity, the one religion that has any vital relation to the modern world or any universal missionary function.

And to-day, as ever, Christianity, for all its failures and weaknesses, has in the Person of its Founder an enduring principle of regeneration. In fellowship with Him is the one hope of the world. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," saith the Lord of Love.

II

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

THE subject of our present discussion is a subject of vital interest and importance, not only to Christians, but to any one who thinks at all. Only a small minority of people have serious difficulty in believing that God is. Belief in the existence of a supernatural power or powers is practically universal: it may almost be called an intuition. We are constrained by a kind of instinct to believe that above and beyond the things we see abides a Reality transcending all. Poets and mystics agree in this matter with scientists and philosophers: the primitive savage agrees with the modern man. No arguments are likely to convince us that the universe is self-evolved, self-explanatory, and self-sufficient. Very few people are prepared to believe that the world is simply the product of blind forces acting blindly on blind stems, *i.e.* that a seemingly orderly universe is the issue of mere chance.

Theoretical materialism is never likely to be a popular creed: it conflicts too obviously with the instincts, the intelligence and the experience of mankind. Even the so-called atheist is generally rather in revolt against some presentation of the idea of God than hostile to the idea itself. Even the so-called agnostic is generally ready not only to admit, but even to assert, that God *exists*, strongly as he may repudiate any *knowledge* of God such as we may claim to possess (cf. Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold). It is difficult to discover any ground for believing in the rationality of the Universe which does not presuppose some kind of Theism. We may agree that the conventional arguments for the existence of God, cosmological, teleological, ontological, etc., are all open to the charge of presupposing what they claim to prove, but this is not because the existence of God is a dubious proposition, but rather because it is the implicit postulate of all argument whatsoever.

Most people, then, are easily persuaded that God *is*. Nor is there any general disposition to doubt His power and wisdom: we see abundant evidence of these things in Nature. The difficulty arises when we ask if God can be

reasonably regarded as good and gracious, holy and loving. It is not the *Being* of God, but the *Character* of God that constitutes the crux of the problem. We are almost bound to believe in some sort of God: the question is what sort of God we are to believe in. Plenty of people have believed in very unattractive and objectionable gods: even the God of Christianity has been caricatured and debased. God has been credited—or debited—with every kind of vice, *e.g.* sensuality, cruelty, sharp practice. A highly moralized conception of God is uncommon, and even in the case of Judaism was only reached after centuries of discipline. This accounts for the undeniable fact that Religion has often been anything but favourable to moral progress, and even associated with debasing beliefs and customs. No religion can exercise a healthy influence which has not a noble idea of God at the heart and soul of it.

Now it will hardly be questioned that Jesus' conception of God is the most sublime and satisfying of all theologies. It is true that the Holy Love of God was not an idea that Jesus originated: we find it in Hosea and Jeremiah, in the Psalmists, and occasionally in the later

Jewish literature. People before Jesus had had glimpses of the Fatherhood of God: such glimpses may even be found in some of the Greek poets. But Jesus made the Holy Love of God central to His theology: the thought of God as Father dominates His teaching. Above all, He so revealed God that His followers came to look at God through Jesus' eyes—yes, and to see the glory of God in Jesus' face. By His life, death and resurrection, more than by His precepts, He made the Heavenly Father seem real. Of course Jesus knew that the term "Father" is only pictorial: it is not to be construed in any other than the highest sense, and even then it is neither adequate nor exhaustive. But it does at least suggest what Jesus believed to be the truth: it is the least inadequate term that we can frame. We shall not offend the spirit of Jesus if we think of God as the Ideal Friend or Ideal Mother as well as the Ideal Father, for in His revelation of God all perfections meet. It is indeed a remarkable fact that, with all the centuries of moral progress and enlarging culture, we have not transcended Jesus' thought of God, or even fully comprehended it; this is a thing we must consider in

trying to estimate whether Jesus was just the greatest of a line of prophets or whether He was something more. But in any case Jesus has set forth a conception of God which renders all others obsolete: if God be less than Jesus believed Him to be, I do not see how we can worship Him at all, for we cannot truly worship anything beneath the Best.

Some high and mighty philosophers have complained that the simple doctrine of Jesus is "anthropomorphic." They seem to think it a childish error to attribute to God even the highest and noblest attributes of man. All through the ages philosophers have tended, not so much to atheism, as to a kind of agnosticism. They have taught ideas of God that removed Him altogether from the understanding of ordinary men. The Absolute Being of philosophic thought is so abstract and so unintelligible that to all intents and purposes Philosophy might have abolished God altogether. Greek thought and Indian thought have both developed in this way: the same thing happened in the school of Hegel, and more recently in the doctrine of Herbert Spencer. But, obviously, if we are to think at all, we must think in terms of the highest

we know, and have faith that thoughts of this kind correspond to reality.

Note that philosophers do not really escape from anthropomorphism by calling God "the Infinite" or "the Unknowable" or "anith": they simply substitute human abstractions for the concrete terms of real human experience. While guarding against a crude and unworthy anthropomorphism, which is the vice of popular religious thought, we must avoid the vain abstractions which some philosophies have recommended as destined to supersede the lofty anthropomorphism of Jesus. If God is not in some way represented by such terms as Holy Love and Heavenly Father, He might just as well not exist. In *higher* terms we *cannot* think; and *lower* terms we *dare* not think: the only alternative is not to think at all!

But the question still remains, Is it possible, in the light of facts and experience, to hold fast the faith that Jesus held? There are indeed believers who are never troubled by doubt on this point: they are sure that Jesus knew the truth and they are prepared to take His word, even though appearances may seem to contradict it. If He be indeed the Son, we

have seen the Father, and no further discussion is necessary or profitable. On the other hand, there are many earnest and sincere souls who are haunted by the fear that Jesus may have been the victim of a beautiful but baseless delusion; indeed, at first sight, the fate of Jesus Himself seems like a contradiction of His faith: Calvary appears to give the lie to Galilee. No doubt it is very comforting to think of God as Jesus thought of Him, but may not the wish be father to the thought? may we not be fashioning reality in the likeness of our own dreams, or of Jesus' dreams, instead of seeing it steadily and seeing it whole? These questions have gained a new poignancy in view of the horrors and tragedies through which the world has recently passed and is still passing. Personally, I do not think we can dismiss them by a simple appeal to faith. At least we ought to try and clear the way for faith by removing as far as possible some of the difficulties that most often arise. It is surely not wrong or unreasonable for people to demand that the truth of religion should find some validation in the facts of life and experience. If we say that such a demand is impious, they may fairly re-

taliate by calling our preaching a form of "dope."

Now this brings us face to face with what is called the problem of Evil. Of course Evil is a word that needs some defining: it is, to begin with, a relative term. This is recognized in the homely proverb that "One man's meat is another man's poison." What is poisonous for man may be life to plants. So it is possible, and even probable, that what seems evil from our point of view might not seem evil if we could see all things *sub specie aternitatis*. Our experience is so fragmentary and our knowledge so limited that we need to be cautious in generalizing about the universe and suggesting ideas for its improvement. Yet we cannot help having our thoughts about things, and certainly we do see things that appear puzzling and perplexing. Many people think and say that the kind of God we believe in could not possibly have created the world that now is. The old Epicurean dilemma is always resurrecting: either God could have made a better world, and He did not—in which case His moral character is impeached; or He wanted to make

a better world, and was not able—in which case His omnipotence ceases to be credible.

Of course one obvious way of solving this problem is to deny its existence—to say that evil is unreal. This is the line taken by the Christian Scientists, so-called. They regard Sin as a myth and pain as an illusion. Affirming that God is perfect, they deny that anything is imperfect, or can possibly be imperfect. Ideas to the contrary are treated by Christian Scientists as nightmares of "mortal mind." This naive optimism seems to most of us contrary to common sense; if you tread on my favourite corn no amount of philosophizing will convince me that I am not really hurt, and no amount of piety will prevent me from thinking that corns are a nuisance and you a careless idiot. But, even on the theory that sin is a myth and pain an illusion, one cannot help wondering what myths and illusions are doing in a perfect world, especially such a nasty myth as my corn, and such an unpleasant illusion as the pain I imagine when you tread on it. "Mortal mind" doesn't solve the difficulty, for naturally I want to know where "mortal mind" came from and why God allows it.

The same difficulty arises when people try to save the credit of God by tracing evil to satanic or demonic agency; it only pushes the problem farther back and does not really help to solve it. No, it is silly to deny that evil exists, relatively to us, and, in view of the fact of sin, we must believe that evil is real to God, unless we are to represent Him as indifferent to moral distinctions that appear absolute.

But I do not really think we need trouble any more about the theory which denies evil *in toto*: the tendency to-day is all in the other direction. People are increasingly sensitive to pain: it might be better if they were equally sensitive to sin. There is certainly a broadening of human sympathies: we are appalled as we think of the famine-stricken peasants of Russia or of the starving children of Vienna. We have a kind of fellow-feeling for the dumb and helpless animals: we cannot bear to think of all the cruelty and suffering that goes on. Our wider knowledge has lent a new and tragic meaning to that Pauline phrase which speaks of the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together until now. Has not a modern poet spoken of "Nature red in

tooth and claw"? And as we return to man we remember that:

"... the world is dark with griefs and graves,
So dark that men cry out against the heavens."

Few indeed there are who have not some time or other "cried out," and we cannot forget that even Jesus "cried out" (Mark xv. 34).

Now in honestly facing this great problem, the first thing we must do is to remember that a vast amount of suffering—certainly of human suffering—is directly or indirectly traceable to sin. Many have argued that there is an *invariable* connection between the two, but this is obviously an exaggeration, as the author of Job pointed out, and as Jesus Himself pointed out. But the danger to-day is that people underrate rather than overrate the extent to which sin is responsible for suffering. Our tendency is to blame God for things that we have it in our power to put right ourselves. Poverty is preventible. War is preventible. Most disease is preventible. Vice and drunkenness, greed and selfishness, cheat us of good we might enjoy, and inflict on the world ever-widening circles of grief and

wretchedness. You may reply that in a perfect world sin would never be permitted, to which the unanswerable rejoinder is that sin is simply an abuse of the freedom without which no moral existence is conceivable. If men were automatic, they could certainly not be sinners, but equally certainly they could not be men in any true sense of the term. Moral capacities in the nature of the case must co-exist with possibilities of moral lapse. Even God could not determine otherwise, any more than He could make a square with the properties of a triangle.

Note that Omnipotence does not mean the power to do things inherently self-contradictory, but rather the power to do anything that is not self-contradictory and in accord with the Nature of the Omnipotent—God can neither make a square triangle nor a moral automaton; further, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished.

God does not will that any one should sin, but He does will that every man shall have a chance of becoming like Himself in moral character and disposition, which involves that every man has also the chance of becoming lower than the brutes. In a moral universe,

therefore, we must presuppose (1) the reality of human freedom, involving the possibility of sin; (2) the reality of God's reaction against the abuse of freedom, involving suffering, penal and redemptive. The Christian conception of God at once explains these things and justifies them. We cannot conceive of a God Who is Holy Love allowing His commandments to be broken with impunity: such laxity would savour more of foolish weakness than of holy love. The suffering that comes to the sinner witnesses alike to God's justice and God's grace: it is both a vindication of God's character as the Upholder of universal righteousness and a call to repentance and amendment of life.

No, I do not think we should feel much difficulty if the suffering of the world were limited to those who were manifestly suffering for their own wrong-doing. The trouble is that almost invariably the innocent are involved with the guilty: indeed the innocent often seem to suffer more (cf. results of the Great War). This appears at first sight wrong and unfair. We can easily understand Judas suffering, but we cannot so easily understand Jesus suffering. If a man lives a vicious life

it seems only just that he should be punished, but why should his innocent wife and tiny children be afflicted with loathsome disease? This is a mystery that only becomes clear when we remember that we are not so many isolated and independent units, but joined together in a real solidarity. Human beings do not exist in this world like so many marbles in a box: we are actually "members one of another," participating in a common life. The ancients realized this idea more vividly than we do; it is a truth that needs to be re-emphasized. Through our connection with our fathers and forefathers, through tradition and education received from our elders, we reap the hard-won gains of the centuries: "Other men have laboured and ye have entered into their labours." Through our connection with our fellow-men in the world to-day our life is expanded and enriched beyond all telling. If we had to fight life's battles on our own individual resources it would be a bad look-out for the best and strongest of us. Every bit of honest work, every true discovery, every noble deed, every honest word, every cross that is bravely taken and bravely borne, becomes a means of grace to all. I must not

pause to relate this truth to the Christian doctrine of Atonement: I only call attention to the obvious fact that we cannot benefit by our partnership in the great concern without involving ourselves in the reaction of its failure and follies—we cannot expect to share all the gains and dodge all the losses. Or, changing the metaphor, we cannot expect, in reaping a harvest that we have not sown, to reap all the wheat and miss all the tares. It is impossible to think of a world in which the gains of good would spread from life to life without thinking of a world in which the fruits of ill would do the same. "If one member suffers, all the members share its suffering; if one member is honoured, all the members share its honour."

But there is still a good deal of suffering in the world that appears to escape either of the former classifications. People suffer for ignorance and sorrow that no one can call culpable. Children suffer, apart altogether from sin or neglect on the part of parents. Even dumb animals suffer, though it is difficult to form a correct estimate of the nature and extent of their suffering. Cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, droughts,

etc., cause an immense amount of misery and loss not to be explained by any special sin on the part of the victims affected. We naturally wonder what moral purpose or useful end can possibly be achieved by such dispensations as these. We must indeed be careful of exaggeration : sudden death is probably much more merciful in reality than death under conditions of lingering disease. Nor can we say that death is in itself an evil : an indefinite prolongation of terrestrial existence might reasonably be considered a bane rather than a boon — I gravely doubt whether Methuselah was any happier than we are. Indeed, under existing conditions, death seems an essential part of the scheme of human progress.

Moreover, a very elementary acquaintance with the facts of Evolution reveals to us that pain is often at once a warning and a stimulus : pain is Nature's danger-signal ; pain opens the road to new discoveries and new developments. A painless world would apparently be a stagnant, unprogressive, uninteresting, uneducative world. It is in struggle that the various species are made perfect : it is in struggle that intellect and character find

training and development. Up to a point, there is real joy in contending with hostile circumstances (cf. Polar explorers, Alpine climbers, etc.). Even a child finds more satisfaction in solving a puzzle for himself than in having the solution presented to him right away. A mechanically perfect world would be a very uninspiring residence: in it there would be no room for faith and patience, no opportunities for high endeavour or dauntless heroism, no call and no challenge. The virile and progressive peoples have all come from lands where life is hard and the battle of existence strenuous. Genius has been cradled in tragedy: the noblest songs are the songs in the night. The Master is but the supreme example of the truth that men are "made perfect through sufferings," while on the other hand the spoilt children of fortune are commonly superficial and even disagreeable creatures. The maimed hero of the war need waste no envy on the wretched profiteer; the toiling mother need waste no envy on the childless butterflies of smart society. Of course it is true that suffering often seems to embitter and degrade rather than to elevate, but here we need to remember that such results

are by no means the *necessary* results of suffering : they are the results, not of the suffering *per se*, but of the spirit in which it is borne (cf. the two thieves on the cross). The fact that suffering is not always educative in its results is no proof that suffering is not educative in its purpose. No one is *compelled* to benefit by suffering : it is simply a question of personal attitude, and as such is related to the great fact of human freedom which we are discussing elsewhere.

One might say much concerning the way in which suffering is often a call and challenge not only to the sufferer, but to the sympathy and service of others. A world without suffering would be a world which had lost the possibility of a John Howard, an Elizabeth Fry, a Florence Nightingale, a Father Damien, a David Livingstone. It would be a world in which the noblest Christian virtues—active and passive—would probably die of inanition. Moral capacities need exercise if they are to be developed : dormant virtues are apt to die. In ministering to others we find the appointed means of moral growth—the very way that the Master went. This is, of course, no reason for slackening in our efforts to reduce and

abolish preventible suffering, but it is a reason for exercising faith in regard to the suffering that seems inevitable and inescapable.

I deliberately avoid saying much about the bearing of the future life on the problems we are considering, though to the Christian this point of view is immensely helpful. We believe that this life is but part of a vaster scheme: we believe in a larger purpose yet to be revealed (Rom. viii. 18). The Christian waits in faith and hope for the fuller understanding that time will bring, and for the perfect understanding which is possible only in eternity. But even people who are not Christians ought to realize the absurdity of thinking that finite creatures like ourselves are competent to pass a final verdict on a scheme so vast and comprehensive as that of the Universe. If indeed we could understand everything, we should have fair reason to think that there was nothing worthy to understand. I grant that in the end we must appeal to faith, but I plead that the faith we appeal to is essentially a reasonable faith, and that an impartial survey even of the darkest realities of experience leaves us with ample justification for the great adventure of the

soul. Not in blind credulity or ignorant fanaticism, but in all soberness we can say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," and renew the faith that found its sublimest expression among the Galilean hills.

III

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT PRAYER

I

PRAYER is the normal and natural expression of any kind of religious faith: we can no more have religion without prayer than speech without sound or life without atmosphere. A religion without prayer is either a dead form or a philosophy masquerading as a religion: in neither case does it deserve to be called religion. Prayer is the act in which the soul becomes consciously related to the unseen and eternal, in which it achieves the fellowship which it is the end of religion to make possible.

The definition of prayer is not easy to compass, for the simple reason that prayer is a term that covers practically the whole area of religious experience. It includes many elements—praise and thanksgiving, confession and consecration, intercession and petition.

Any lifting of the heart to God may be called prayer.

Whether desires and yearnings that are not formally explicated or consciously related to God may be included in the definition of prayer may possibly be doubted; but I should be inclined to include them, for surely God's response is not dependent on formal expression or correctness of address.

> "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
> Uttered or unexpressed:
> The motion of a hidden fire
> That trembles in the breast."

This is good poetry and good theology!

Certainly we must not limit prayer to the occasions when we ask God for specific blessings, material or spiritual, for it may fairly be said that in the highest forms of prayer this element is transcended. If we never approach God except to ask favours, our religion may be justly stigmatized as crude and elementary. On the other hand, we must not leave this aspect of prayer as unworthy of consideration, for experience proves that we cannot escape from it.

Prayer, like all the other conceptions of religion, has only gradually been "ethicized."

A low conception of God will inevitably result in a low conception of prayer.

In the primitive stages of religious development the main object of prayer was to secure the aid of the god by the use of magic formulas, incantations, etc., backed as a rule by sacrifices of a prescribed kind. Prayers of this type were conceived as working mechanically: the formulas and incantations had a coercive effect. This variety of superstition still survives in many quarters. Indeed it survives whenever we regard prayer as a means of imposing our will on God rather than as a means of furthering God's will in and through us. Even instructed Christians often pray prayers that are unworthy: as St. James puts it, we "ask amiss," or, as St. Paul says, we know not how to pray "as we ought." One of the things we need to pray for is that our prayers may be determined exclusively by the spirit of Jesus. I need hardly point out that no Christian can make his own such "imprecatory" prayers as fell, naturally and excusably, from the lips of some of the psalmists. If we can thoroughly Christianize our prayers, we have made no small progress in the spiritual life. We need

to be taught how to pray, and it behoves us also to try and teach our people. But my present point is simply that prayer ranges from the lowest levels to the highest—from the crudest petitions of the savage to the loftiest ecstasies of the saint.

Until recent times doubts concerning the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer have been limited to a very small minority of mankind. Men have always prayed, and they are praying still. Undoubtedly people prayed for ages before ever they started reasoning about prayer. Prayer seems to be almost instinctive: even professed atheists have been known to pray in situations of stress and anxiety—situations in which the primary instincts are more apt to assert themselves. People are praying to-day who would be puzzled if required to offer a reasoned justification of prayer or to explain "how it works." Yet it cannot be doubted that a philosophy of prayer is necessary and that an apologetic of prayer is called for, especially in the circumstances of the modern situation. Multitudes of sincere and excellent people have been deprived of the consolation, strength, and

blessing that flow from conscious and believing prayer, deprived by reason of the intellectual difficulties and perplexities that have gathered round the subject. And many others who are still praying are haunted by these difficulties and perplexities, and pray rather from habit and custom than in a spirit of joyful and assured conviction. Possibly the feebleness which we lament in the prayer life of our Churches may be due to the insidious influence of the materialistic conceptions that have percolated so extensively into the minds of the people: it is reasonable to suppose that declining interest in the practice of prayer is connected with a waning of those convictions which naturally result in prayer. I am bound to say that I think we should be shocked if we could estimate, not simply the falling off in attendance at prayer meetings, but also the falling off in private observance of hours and habits of devotion. Nor shall we meet this grave situation by earnest appeals, much less by barren dogmatizings: we must show the people clearly and convincingly that the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer are not invalidated by any of the arguments that are commonly used against them.

II

This is the more urgent because it seems to me an incontestable fact that the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer are propositions quite fundamental to the Christian view of God and the world: they must necessarily be counted among the essentials of the faith. Certainly there can be no doubt of the importance assigned to prayer in the Biblical literature, more especially in the New Testament. Everywhere prayer is exemplified, commended, and insisted upon. The precept and practice of Jesus compels us to regard Him as at once the most emphatic and the most authoritative witness to the necessity and value of prayer. He prayed Himself, and He taught His disciples to pray. His teaching on this subject is remarkable for its fullness and fervour. Jesus sets no limits to the efficacy of believing prayer: vast are the promises that Jesus attaches to the prayer of faith. Even if we deduct something for Oriental hyperbole, this assertion holds good. It is true that Jesus never attempts a formal rationale of prayer. His doctrine of prayer seems to flow inevitably from the conception

He had of the nature of God as Father—a conception born in and strengthened by His own unique experience of prayerful communion with the Unseen.

All Christian prayer starts out, as it were, from the Christian idea of God. Jesus taught us to believe in a personal God, accessible to prayer, able and willing to reward them that love and diligently seek Him; in a Heavenly Father who welcomes the prayers of His children, with whom it is both a duty and a delight to have fellowship. When people cease to pray it is generally because they have come to the conclusion that Jesus' conception of God is not in accordance with reality.

But Jesus was not speaking to people who had theoretical doubts about prayer. His object was rather to induce people to pray the right prayers and to pray them in the right way. He devoted much attention to what we may call perversions of prayer—meaningless repetitions, ostentatious devotions, prayers poisoned by pride, malice, and uncharitableness. It is hardly necessary to say that Jesus regarded the value of prayer as entirely dependent on the spirit in which it was offered. Above all, He lays stress on

the need for unquestioning faith and heroic persistence : He tells us that the efficacy of our prayers will be directly proportioned to the faith that inspired them—a faith that must not falter even in the presence of apparent denial. The more we study the Gospels, the more convinced we shall be that, if Jesus' teaching about prayer is radically unsound, He must needs lose all claim to authority in the realm of the spiritual life.

Furthermore, we must observe that in all the ages the faithful followers of Christ have recognized the practice of prayer as at once the imperative duty and the glorious privilege of the true disciple. The Church was cradled and nurtured in prayer : the great experience of Pentecost is represented as a direct answer to importunate prayer. Indeed, "Prayer, Power, Progress" may be regarded as summarizing the history of every revival of evangelical religion from that time even until now. Prayer is a kind of barometer accurately reflecting the spiritual atmosphere of the Christian community in any time or place : the strength of Christian faith can always be measured by the pressure it exerts on the

instinct of prayer. Without prayer we may have Christian speculation and Christian moralism—of a hard and barren sort—but not Christianity, certainly not the Christianity of Jesus and the New Testament, the Christianity that turns the world upside down. To disparage or discontinue prayer is simply to repudiate all the witnesses that Christians have hitherto regarded as authoritative, including the most authoritative of all. A tremendous burden of proof rests on anybody who invites us to do this. It is neither credulous nor unreasonable to insist that this burden shall be duly discharged before we yield to so revolutionary an invitation.

III

But it must be admitted that we have come face to face with facts and theories which appear at first sight altogether subversive of the doctrine and practice of prayer. Our view of the world is certainly very different from the view entertained by the Biblical writers and the Christians of primitive and mediæval times. The old cosmogony has vanished before the advance of our new know-

ledge: we no longer think in terms of a "three-compartment" universe. A hell beneath the earth and a heaven above the sky were obviously fancies of a prescientific age. The conception of a universe governed in all its parts by laws that appear to be invariably operative and intimately interrelated has made the idea of miracle or special intervention increasingly difficult: some educated people doubtless accept certain miracles because they accept Christianity, but very few people find in miracles a real help to faith. Moreover, the vastness of the universe seems to dwarf man: it appears only vain conceit to imagine that our feeble prayers can reach, much less move, "the Mind that moves the whole." From this point of view prayer is scouted as a practice savouring of the age of prescientific darkness, reflecting only a naïve egoism born of ignorance.

In commenting on this position I desire to point out that Science has by no means acquired such a comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge of the universe as this position presupposes. Even to-day scientists are gravely considering whether such doctrines

as those of the indestructibility of matter and the conservation of energy are really so firmly established that they may be regarded as absolute truths. Many are inclined to answer in the negative. The very nature of matter seems to elude investigation : it is certain that it is not the solid, substantial thing that the man in the street imagines. The laws of Science are not of any explanatory value : they are merely descriptive and provisional summaries of certain sequences that appear to hold good under certain conditions. But most important is it to note that the relation of Mind to Matter remains extraordinarily obscure. All attempts to represent Mind as a mode or by-product of Matter have ended in disaster : it seems much more likely that Matter is a mode of Mind. The theory of psycho-physical parallelism is a hypothesis that really throws little light on the subject : it is obviously a statement rather than an explanation of the facts. Mechanical theories of the universe break on the rock of Personality : it is not surprising that naturalism should blankly deny human freedom and volition, for these are realities that cannot be dealt with in terms of mechanics. Yet

nothing will persuade us that we have no power to will and to do things that otherwise would remain unwilled and undone: our very conception of cause undoubtedly originates in our own consciousness of ourselves as causes. It is by our own control and direction of natural forces that we are able to transform our environment: we are continually modifying the course of nature in accordance with purposes and ideals that nature never originated and that nature, left to itself, would never have fulfilled. As I write this chapter, I am performing an act that all the mechanics in the world cannot finally account for. I am performing a creative act—an act in which all natural law is transcended—an act which is a modification of the course and order of the universe.

Recent inquiries have revealed that the power of Mind over Matter extends much farther than was once believed: I need only allude to the phenomena of Faith Healing. Many people whose leanings are anything but orthodox are freely admitting that "miracles of healing" are now to be recognized as facts of experience, and are crediting accounts both in the Gospels and elsewhere that a generation

ago were dismissed as incredible. If, then, I can operate as an effectual cause in the material world, surely I can operate as an effectual cause in the spiritual world? I do, in fact, so operate when I influence the thought and action of other people, and modern investigations into telepathy, or thought-transference, seem to indicate that such operation may occur, even independently of any material medium. In the light of this, intercessory prayer may easily find a scientific justification. It is really impossible to set any arbitrary limit to the powers of personality: everything depends on actual experience, and no mere hypothesis can stand against experimental testimony. And if it be undoubtedly true that human personality is a real factor both on the material and on the spiritual plane, is it unscientific to believe that personalities subhuman and superhuman may have a part in the scheme of things?

It seems irrational to take it for granted that we are the only pebbles on the beach, the only persons in the universe. I see no difficulty in believing in spirits good and bad, or in believing that discarnate spirits may have an influence on affairs. It is all a matter of

evidence: the presuppositions are rather favourable to such a possibility. But, above all, can we deny the possibility of a Supreme Personality so controlling and directing the whole course of affairs, in general and in detail, as to fulfil rational purposes, without necessarily involving any capricious changing of modes of action that normally express His Mind and Will? And have we any right arbitrarily to assume that He is necessarily incapable of being moved and influenced by the prayer of men? Again: I say it is all a matter of evidence. No science has any right to answer dogmatically in the negative. The most it can do is to ask for proof. Scientifically my intervention in the universe is a mystery just as much as any intervention on the part of God.

This leads me to consider the objection to prayer which arises on the theological side. Granted that there is nothing in the constitution of the material universe to invalidate the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer, may not the nature of God be so conceived as to make prayer a superfluity and even an impertinence? If God be indeed all wise and

all good, is it not rational to suppose that in any case He will determine and effect what is best, without either advice or entreaties from puny and ignorant creatures like ourselves? Why not leave things entirely to Him, in the serene faith that all things will work together for good? It seems absurd to imagine that His direction of affairs can be modified or bettered by any prayer of ours. It might even seem more reverent and religious *not* to pray than to pray, and at any rate it might seem that prayer should strictly exclude any element of petition and be limited to what may be called meditation—soliloquy or communion. This is a point of view which has influenced many genuinely pious people, and it deserves a little thought.

I certainly agree that we need to guard ourselves against any view of prayer which represents petition as the supreme end of prayer. I agree that we ought not to pray simply and solely with the idea of extracting favours. And, of course, we need to remember that Jesus never represented God as like the Unjust Judge, reluctantly compelled to meet the demands of the importunate suppliant.

No instructed Christian will ever seek to

dictate to God in prayer. The purpose of prayer is not to get our own way, but to give God the opportunity of getting His way. It would be disastrous if we could always get what we wanted just by praying for it: we cannot rightly judge the ultimate issues of things and therefore we need to pray always, "Not my will, but Thine, be done." Absolute faith in God is essential to Christian prayer. He certainly wishes our highest good and seeks it in all His dealings with us. But I cannot see any difficulty in believing that His gracious purposes may be partially conditioned by our willingness to pray. Common experience proves that God's purposes for the world are partially conditioned on our willingness to co-operate with Him in thought and action. We do not refrain from sending missionaries to the heathen because we believe that God yearns for the evangelization of these heathen infinitely more than we do. We do not discourage the efforts of social reformers by telling them that God is perfectly able to bring about the ideal commonwealth without any human assistance. We do not expect to get anything in this world without exerting ourselves. Nature invariably requires our

co-operation in order to yield her fruits and treasures for our enjoyment. *A priori* theories about God's ways of working are at best highly precarious, and in this case seem at variance with ordinary experience. If God calls on me for co-operation in all the tasks I have alluded to, and in countless others, why should I pronounce it incredible that He should require my prayers? The welfare of myself and others depends partly on my character and conduct: why should it not be furthered by my prayers? Moreover, prayer is the normal and natural expression of that intensity of desire and consecration of spirit without which the greatest blessings are necessarily denied. God Himself cannot impart blessings to people unfitted for their enjoyment: a gift must be related to the spiritual attitude and capacity of the recipient, and not simply to the grace of the giver. By our prayer we may create and modify spiritual conditions in such a way that things become possible otherwise impossible, in just the same fashion as by action on the material plane we enable things to happen that otherwise would not have occurred. No, I see no *a priori* objection, either scientific or theological, to belief in the ob-

jective efficacy of prayer, not simply as a kind of spiritual gymnastic, but as a real factor in the course of events. It may be reasonably suspected that, if belief in the *objective* efficacy of prayer were abandoned, the practice of prayer as a spiritual gymnastic would not long survive. In actual experience folk who pray are folk who believe that prayer secures *objective* results. The question as to what may actually be achieved in and through prayer is a question that can only be answered in the light of the experience of those who pray.

Thus we come to the third objection to prayer, which is neither scientific nor theological, but simply practical. This objection points out that many prayers are apparently unanswered, and that, even when they do seem to be answered, the same results might have happened without any prayers at all. People pray all kinds of prayers: some are seemingly effectual; others are not. Some very unworthy persons get all they want; some very good and pious persons are constantly disappointed and oppressed.

On this objection I would point out, Firstly,

that the failure of many prayers can be amply accounted for by the fact that they do not fulfil the conditions laid down in the New Testament, "Ye ask and ye receive not, because ye ask amiss." Merely formal prayers are no good; passionless and faithless prayers are no good; prayers inspired by a greedy, ambitious, and worldly spirit are no good. Indeed they are positively injurious to the person praying, as well as grievous and offensive in the sight of God.

Secondly, even the best and most earnest people may pray for the wrong things: just as we may pray for the right things in the wrong way, so we may pray for the wrong things in the right way. But, while we should neither expect or even desire that our prayers should invariably be answered just in the fashion that seems to us most obvious, it does not follow that our prayers will not be answered at all: the answer may easily transcend the prayer that seems to be denied. The case of Paul and his "thorn in the flesh" is an illustration none the less excellent because it is somewhat hackneyed: our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane is an illustration even more impressive and moving.

Thirdly, I would say that the people who have prayed most, and known the disappointments as well as the triumphs of prayer, testify alike by lip and life to the blessed results of prayer "with the spirit and with the understanding also." The verdict of those who know prayer from the inside must count for more than the verdict of any number of detached critics. No theoretical arguments will enable a sceptical person to *prove* the efficacy of prayer, for his very scepticism will paralyse the faculty on which prayer depends. In this thing, as in many other things, we must believe before we can prove. All that argument can do is to remove erroneous presuppositions that may possibly be standing in the way of faith. But a prayerless man can no more realize the blessedness of prayer than a colour-blind person the glories of the Sistine Madonna. After all, prayer is not ultimately a question of philosophic discussion: it is a matter of living experience, not by any means limited to persons of ecstatic or fanatical temperament. We are bound to attach enormous importance to the *consensus omnium fidelium*. Best of all is our assurance if, out of our own knowledge, we can humbly but

confidently affirm that we have proved the promises that attach to Christian prayer and found them good. When all is said, the final answer to the problem of prayer is found in praying, *Solvitur orando.*

IV

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

BY the Christian Ethic I mean the principles of life and conduct set forth in the New Testament and more especially in the precepts and practice of Jesus. I cannot discuss these in any detail, but must deal with the subject in broad outline, assuming a reasonable knowledge of the textual data.

I

It is only comparatively recently that the Christian Ethic has been subjected to any very serious challenge among thinkers born and bred in a Christian environment, or perhaps I should say in so-called Christian lands. The Reformation modified considerably the mediæval interpretation of the Christian Ethic in regard to subjects like marriage and divorce, usury, etc., but it did not affect the fundamentals. The critical and rational-

ist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to many assaults on traditional views in theology, but "Liberal" thinkers were never tired of emphasizing their reverence for the character of Jesus and their admiration of His ethical teachings. Indeed, it was their contention that in criticizing the traditional Christology, they were really asserting the supremacy of the Christian Ethics which theological disputes and dogmas had tended to obscure. Most of us can recall the ardour with which such unorthodox people as Mill, Lecky, and George Eliot have recorded their endorsement of the moral ideal incarnate in Jesus Christ.

But while the authority and supremacy of the Christian Ethic had, until recently, been generally admitted, there have always been wide differences of interpretation. Such theoretical recognition of New Testament teachings has often been accompanied by glosses and explanations which have secured and even justified an essential worldliness, or at least a considerable measure of practical compromise. In every age, except possibly in the primitive period of Christianity, there have been professing Christians whose moral

standards seem pretty well assimilated to the standards of decent paganism. I am not now referring to obvious and flagrant declension from elementary moral principles, but to average conduct. Professing Christians have not been deterred by any words of Jesus from seeking after wealth, power and position; from envy, malice and uncharitableness. Ingenious excuses have been urged for such things as slavery, persecution and war. Ecclesiastics and ecclesiastically-minded laymen have not invariably been conspicuous for the loftiness of their Christian spirit. If, under Constantine and Theodosius, Christianity conquered the world, the world has made horrible reprisals on Christianity. In every age since then, earnest preachers and reformers have had occasion to emphasize the mournful contrast between conventional Christianity and the Christianity of Jesus. As we survey the moral condition of Christendom we may well ask the question, "Do we take Christ seriously?" The truth is that it is always easier to popularize a religion centering on a prescribed ritual or on the acceptance of formal creeds than to induce people to accept ethical standards which involve social incon-

venience and personal sacrifice. People are always inclined to think of zeal in ritual observance and orthodox profession as a convenient substitute for a morality uncomfortably exalted. Some of us well remember how Hatch contended that the theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries marked a tremendous shifting of emphasis from the ethical to the intellectual interest in Christianity, and how he enlarged on the significant contrast between the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and the spirit of the Œcumenical Creeds. The Hebraic insistence on right conduct and the Christian insistence on right motive were overwhelmed by the Greek emphasis on right belief. I do not say that this is *all* the truth, but it is certainly an aspect of truth that deserves consideration.

If the mass of professing Christians have thus been generally disposed to conventionalize the Christian Ethic, we must not forget that in every age there has been a Puritan minority that has revolted against the spirit of compromise. The Montanists, Novatians and Donatists all justified their schisms on the plea of protest against Catholic laxity, and

we find the same plea among the Waldenses, Hussites, and other dissenting sects in the Middle Ages. Every one remembers how Wycliffe inveighed against the demoralizing wealth of the Church and the unapostolic pomp of the higher clergy. Erasmus and the Oxford Reformers did the same. But most remarkable was the rise within the pale of orthodox Christianity of the spirit of asceticism.

Asceticism is, of course, by no means a specifically Christian phenomenon: we find it in connection with most religions. In eras of decadence, the attitude of pessimism often assumes the form of world renunciation. Such was the case in the declining years of Roman Imperialism. The centuries of confusion that followed on the barbarian invasions naturally encouraged a policy of withdrawal: it seemed impossible to realize the Christian ideal under conditions so adverse. Certainly very few people succeeded in doing so. While the mass of Christians took the world as they found it, a minority abandoned the world in disgust. In Egypt and Syria from very early times we hear of Christian hermits and even of monastic communities. In lifelong poverty and celibacy

they sought to perfect their Christian life and to follow the ordinances of Christ. We may think these people mistaken, and indeed they were often ignorant, dirty and fanatical, devoid alike of patriotism and natural affection, but at least they took the Christian Ethic seriously and counted all things but less if they might only win Christ and be found in Him. Under the strong influence of Jerome this movement became an outstanding feature of Church history, and so continued throughout the Middle Ages. I have no time to speak of the rule of St. Benedict and the various monastic orders, or of St. Francis and his friars. Protestant writers are apt to dwell exclusively on the darker aspects of mediævalism and to see monks and friars only in their degeneracy, but the ideal of these movements was truly noble and the services they rendered to industry, learning and piety must not be forgotten. Catholicism has tended to over-emphasize the passive and contemplative aspects of the Christian Life, but it is probably true that ordinary Protestantism has tended to over-emphasize the life of activity and some-what to secularize the Christian ideal. Certainly I do not think the people in our Churches

suffer too much from the allurements of asceticism: their inclinations are mostly the other way.

Yet, of course, it is perfectly true that asceticism is a distortion of the Christian Ethic. Jesus was emphatically not an ascetic: it was a subject of complaint that in this respect He differed from John the Baptist. He laid tremendous stress on the duty of renouncing anything that might conflict with the claims of the Kingdom, and confidently predicted for His disciples a life of crucifixion. Isolated passages might be quoted that sound ascetic, notably in connection with the renunciation of wealth.

Luke is particularly emphatic in insisting on this point of view, so much so that some critics have credited Luke with an Ebionite tendency, a theory that must be pronounced unsound. But I do not think Jesus ever commended sacrifice for its own sake, much less encouraged a life of gratuitous self-maceration: certainly He never contemplated that His most ardent disciples should abandon the world and spend their days exclusively in pious exercises. Rather were they to be as salt or leaven, to let their light shine before

men, to live in the world without being overcome by it. While it may be right for people called to special forms of service to renounce secular activities, and even the joys of home and family life, I cannot see in Jesus' teaching any justification for that double standard of morality which asceticism involves. The notion that a small minority of people are to seek an artificial and cloistered perfection, while the great mass are to rest satisfied with a lower standard of Christian living, is not discoverable in the New Testament, and is open to the severest criticism. It is necessary to insist on this even to-day, in view of the tendency of many people to think of Christian ministers as subject to ethical obligations and disabilities from which the ordinary Church member is exempt. We must not indeed lower the ethical standards of the Christian ministry, rather the opposite, but we are bound at the same time to urge that the same lofty standards apply to all who profess and call themselves Christians. For all of us the gate is strait and the way is narrow; for all of us the call of Christ must imply readiness to take up the cross daily in the following of Him.

Hitherto we have been considering interpretations of the Christian Ethic which definitely recognize the New Testament teaching as authoritative. Conventional Christianity may dilute the New Testament and ascetic Christianity may distort it, but both acknowledge Jesus as the final court of appeal. The same is true of the very interesting interpretation of Tolstoy, which may almost be considered a form of asceticism. Feeling as he did that conventional Christianity was no better than a sham, he fell back on a crudely liberal interpretation of the teachings of Christ, preaching a doctrine of Christian anarchism, repudiating all coercion, military or political, and denouncing the whole organization of existing society as an agency of exploitation and oppression. He was equally outspoken on questions of sex relationships, on which subject his tone is decidedly ascetic. Much of this had been anticipated by the Quakers, though not in quite so extreme a form. I believe that in all ages there have been Christians who have regarded military service as unlawful, oaths as sinful, and worldly standards generally as immoral. Even today there are many earnest people who lay

immense stress on certain rather isolated aspects of Christian Ethics, in opposition to the prevailing tendencies of the unregenerate world. Some sects make total abstinence from intoxicants a condition of fellowship; others have placed a ban on smoking, dancing, theatre-going, card-playing, and even on novel-reading.

The question of Sunday observance is another matter on which acute difference exists among Christians. On one side we have the Catholics, Roman and Anglican, and the Protestant Churches of the Continent, and on the other the Churches that have been influenced by English and Scottish Puritanism. One of the most perplexing practical problems we have to face arises in this connection. Where are we to "draw the line" in Christian Ethics? To what extent may we officially countenance things that at one time or another the Christian conscience has condemned? To what extent may we assume the task of directing our people in regard to their private and personal attitude concerning such matters? At one time the Dissenting Churches in England and the Puritan Churches in America were constantly occupied with

questions of Church discipline, generally turning on some point of Christian Ethics, and often leading to violent divisions and any amount of bitterness. Presbyteries and Church meetings exercised an inquisitorial supervision over the private lives of Church members that can hardly be realized except by people who have made a special study of the subject.

We are more liberal, perhaps occasionally lax, in such matters, but they still haunt our denominational discussions and our conversation at Fraternals. The truth is that few of us have ever thought very much on the fundamental principles of Christian Ethics, and our detailed applications have often been determined by tradition and education, custom and prejudice, rather than by any more rational consideration. Roman Catholicism and High Anglicanism have devoted systematic attention to problems of ethics, a natural consequence of the institution of the confessional. I must say that I think we might do more in this direction, while carefully avoiding the spirit of legalism which so often accompanies the study of casuistry. People who would resent dictation are often grateful for guidance, and

we may do them a service if we only put before them the "pros" and "cons" of some of the more obvious and difficult questions.

II

But I pass to the larger issues raised by the present position of Christian Ethics. While we are wondering if it is right to allow boys to play cricket on Sundays or whether it is wicked to tolerate whist in the men's club, a large section of thinking people is challenging the essential principles of the teaching of Christ and challenging them not only in practice but in theory. The ethics of Christianity cannot really be divorced from the theology of Christianity: if people doubt or deny the presuppositions of Jesus' teaching, it is natural that they should doubt or deny the ethical conceptions that flow from these presuppositions. I do not believe that Morality can be separated from Religion: certainly I do not believe that Christian Morality can survive if Christianity itself be repudiated. If people come under the sway of materialistic views of the world, it is bound to have a reaction on their ideals of conduct. The notion that it does not make very much

difference what a man believes about God, Church and Human Destiny, is one of the most idiotic heresies of popular conversation. Obviously rational people will tend to adjust their manner of life to their conceptions of its ultimate meaning and background. Hence it is not surprising that the progress of disintegration in theology has been followed by a widespread revolt against Christian Ethics.

The first type of revolt is represented by the frequently expressed conviction that Christianity is ethically impossible, human nature being what it is, and in view of the actual conditions of everyday life. Often it is admitted that ideally it is admirable, and even that it may find some practical application in domestic relationships and in friendly intercourse. But it is said that in business and politics, at any rate, Christianity cannot and does not "work." Thus a fatal dichotomy is introduced into life, a kind of reproduction of the Catholic distinction between life in the world and the specifically "religious" life, or of the very common distinction between things "sacred" and things "secular." Of course this dichotomy has no sanction in the

New Testament: the attempt to divide life into watertight compartments is essentially futile. "We cannot serve God and Mammon": it is impossible to have one foot in the Kingdom of Christ and another in a society where Christ is neither recognized nor obeyed. This is a kind of compromise bound to issue in unreality and even hypocrisy. The ethics of compromise constitute indeed a difficult and delicate subject, but at least we may say that the New Testament does not permit us to acquiesce in any compromise on the lines indicated above. It is indeed certain that the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount were not given as ideals to be dreamed about, but as principles to be lived up to. It is quite absurd to represent these precepts as only applying to ideal people in an ideal world: the language and presuppositions of Jesus' teaching entirely prohibit any such representation. But it is perfectly true that Jesus, here and elsewhere, is speaking to *disciples*: He neither intends nor expects that His ethic will be recognized or applied by people who are *not* Christians, or by individuals calling themselves Christians who seek to serve God *and* Mammon. I entirely agree that Jesus is here demanding more than

human nature can fulfil, and to me the ethical teaching of Jesus is unintelligible unless we relate it, not only to the Christian doctrine of *God*, but to the Christian doctrine of *grace*. Only those redeemed by grace and regenerate by the Holy Spirit, only those who are consciously in touch with the supernatural powers and resources to which the Gospel points, can reasonably regard the Sermon on the Mount and similar teachings as anything but quixotic. The prevalence of the evangelical ethic depends on the pervasiveness of the evangelical experience. Without the latter, the former is only the law in a new and more terrible form. To separate the Christian ideal from the Christian dynamic is to put asunder things that God has joined together. It is only as men become really Christian that the doctrines of the Mount can become the practice of the Plain.

The second type of revolt is born in more academic quarters. Whereas the man in the street is inclined to think that the Christian Ethic can only be applied under heavenly conditions in the remote future, and possibly never at all, the recent critics are inclined to argue that Jesus' teaching, and New Testament

teaching generally, is so coloured by apocalyptic presuppositions that it must be called an "Interim Ethik," *i.e.* that it was only intended to be lived out during the brief period that was expected to intervene between the earthly lifetime of Jesus and the final Parousia. This is far too big a subject to work out here, and I only permit myself two observations. The first is that the Sermon on the Mount is remarkable for the almost complete absence of apocalyptic allusion and never contains the slightest hint of its supposed "interim" character. The second is that, if the "interim" theory were true, one would expect that, with the failure of the Parousia hope, the Christian Ethic would have received a shock from which it could hardly have recovered. The undeniable fact that multitudes of Christians have believed and practised the Christian Ethic who were entirely free from Chiliastic propensities is good evidence that the Ethic of Jesus is not bound up with any special type of eschatological thought, at least as regards the broad outline of the teaching.

Thirdly and lastly, I must discuss still more radical criticisms of the Christian Ethic. These

come from people who have altogether abandoned the religious presuppositions of Christianity, and who are sensible enough to see that, if these presuppositions go, the moral injunctions based on these presuppositions must go too. If we live in a godless and mindless universe, it is dubious if we can sustain any morality whatever: certainly we cannot sustain the morality of Jesus. If all the religious teaching of Jesus be relegated to the scrap-heap, it seems quite reasonable to conclude that His ethical teaching deserves no better fate, born as it was of credulity, superstition and fanaticism. Christian sentiment cannot survive the surrender of Christian conviction: the Ethic and the Dogmatic are bound together. If we destroy the root we cannot expect to enjoy the flower: if the root is a lie, the flower must be a folly. Hence we have people telling us that the Christian ideal is not only impracticable, but fundamentally unscientific and unsound. H. G. Wells, in relatively mild language, and Friedrich Nietzsche, in language of fierce invective, affirm that the Christian Ethic is a slave morality. It is a dream, and not even a lovely dream! Nietzsche holds that it is

simply a device whereby the sheep-like herd seek to protect themselves from the subjection which is their just and natural portion. Mercy and forgiveness, patience and long-suffering, are scouted as attributes that can have no place in the life of the Super-Man. Sacrifice for others is simply folly: the only law for the Super-Man is:

> "The good old rule, the simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can."

Not only Nietzsche, but many others, have pointed out that the co-operation and brotherly love which Christianity enjoins seems to run counter to the evolutionary doctrine of "the struggle for life," and "the survival of the fittest," the rule of the jungle "Every one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost." Let the strong glory in their strength, and let the weak "go to the wall." Why should the feeble and the incompetent batten on the sentimentality of their betters? Why should we adopt principles which are the negation of nature and often actually dysgenic? Why should we throw away the pleasures and privileges of power for dreams and delusions of other-worldly fanaticism?

Now I think this type of criticism does good in so far as it draws attention to one weakness in the current presentation of Christ and the Christian Ethic, which needs correction. We have rather under-emphasized the masculine elements in Christian character and even in Jesus Himself. Christianity has seemed to many an anæmic kind of religion, an effeminate kind of religion. We need to stress Christianity as a noble crusade rather than as a passive submission to suffering and martyrdom, as a great adventure rather than as a tame surrender, as a religion for red-blooded men rather than as a refuge for women and invalids. We need to stress the high-hearted heroism, the honour and the robustness of our great Captain, without forgetting His tenderness and grace, His sorrow and His patience. Christian art and even Christian preaching have too often presented Jesus as a pallid figure with an unnatural halo that rather suggested an inhuman holiness. And Christianity itself is not just a message for sick souls, but a gospel for the healthy-minded: it is not meant exclusively for the weak and timid, but is meant also for the strong and the valorous. If the new criticism promotes a

more proportionate presentation of Christ and Christianity, we need not altogether regret its advent.

Yet we must contest its fundamental principles. The reading of Evolution is partial and therefore false: it is not true that Evolution reveals *only* struggle and competition: it reveals also the law of co-operation as a vital factor in progress, as a vital principle of survival. Nor does it justify the assimilation of man to the beasts of the jungle: historically, psychologically, spiritually, we must emphasize the differences rather than the resemblances. As Huxley pointed out in his famous Romanes Lecture, the ethical process is a process that transcends the physical and proceeds on other lines. Similarly, Benjamin Kidd has shown how the fundamental principle of social progress is found in an altruism that only attains its fullest and finest developments in societies swayed by the consciousness of supernatural obligations and sanctions.

Certainly, if we throw aside the Christian view of God, Man and the Universe, we may have to come to some such ethic as Nietzsche's: at any rate, the Christian scheme of values can hardly be conserved But I do not believe

that men who have glimpsed the ethic of Jesus will ever be prepared to accept pre-suppositions which necessitate its abandonment, however poor may be their present response to the vision they see. Amid the moral anarchy of the time there is still echoing the one authoritative Voice, and above its chaos stands the Figure of Him Who said : "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Words shall not pass away."

V

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE VIRGIN BIRTH—APPARENT SCANTINESS OF AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

THE first thing that strikes us in the consideration of this subject is the limited extent of the evidence available. The opening chapters of Matthew and Luke must provide the materials of our discussion. The Gospel of Mark, which is the earliest of the four Gospels, makes not the slightest allusion to the life of Jesus prior to His baptism. The Gospel of John, though later than the Synoptics and utilizing Synoptic material on occasion, is silent on the matter of our Lord's birth, while bearing abundant witness to His supernatural character and laying great stress on His pre-existence. The Pauline Epistles, manifesting as they do a strong Christological interest, insisting as they do on the reality of our Lord's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, contain practically nothing that bears on our present discussion. The same

can be said of the remaining New Testament books. Even in Matthew and Luke, outside the opening chapters, we look in vain for any allusion to the circumstances of our Lord's entry into the world.

Explanation of this State of Affairs

Various explanations have been plausibly advanced in the effort to account for this "conspiracy of silence." It would, indeed, be rash to infer that because a writer makes no allusion to a certain fact or to a certain doctrine he must have been ignorant of the one or incredulous of the other. We may take it as certain that the writer of the Fourth Gospel was acquainted with the Birth Stories: his failure to allude to them cannot be due to ignorance. It is noteworthy that Ignatius, who is manifestly influenced by the Johannine type of thought, is also a strong upholder of the Virgin Birth. We cannot suppose that the writer of the Fourth Gospel was adverse to the doctrine: all we can say is that he was eager to impart an even loftier conception of Christ—to set Him forth as the Divine Logos—the only-begotten Son. The silence of Mark and Paul

may be explained on the theory that the mystery of our Lord's birth was for a long time Mary's secret: motives of delicacy might cause her to delay as much as possible the announcement of a truth that would expose her to possible misunderstanding and even calumny. Only when her life was nearing its end did she reveal the wondrous facts. This, of course, is only a theory, but it has been adopted by many, and it deserves some consideration.

Apparent Inconsistencies with the Virgin Birth Tradition

Far more perplexing than silence is the appearance in the records of passages that seem inconsistent with the historicity of the Virgin Birth tradition. The incident described in Luke ii. 41–51 is a case in point. Joseph and Mary are alluded to quite naturally as "his parents." They are said to have been "astonished" at Jesus' conduct, and His mother roundly rebukes Him for His apparent lack of thoughtfulness and consideration—"Child, why hast thou dealt thus with us: behold, thy father and I sought thee

sorrowing." The attitude of Joseph and Mary, especially Mary, is difficult to understand, in view of the immediately preceding narrative. We should expect them to regard the Holy Child with reverent awe, and to be astonished at nothing He might say or do.

The same perplexity meets us in the incident described in Mark iii. 20–21, 31–35, the connection of which is rather obscured for the ordinary reader by the interposition of vv. 22–30, which belong really to another section of the Gospel narrative. But the fact is scarcely to be denied that Jesus' mother and brethren—presumably Joseph is now dead—not only seem anxious to hinder His ministry, but even seek to arrest Him as a madman. It is indeed possible that Mary was a passive and even an unwilling participant in this painful scene, but there is no indication of this in the narrative, least of all in the stern words in which Jesus declares His *true* family—vv. 33–35. If Mary had the best reasons for knowing the Divine character and mission of her son, her conduct appears not so much reprehensible as inexplicable.

Matt. xiii. 55 proves that among the Nazareth villagers Jesus was regarded as Joseph's

son; John i. 45 and vi. 42 also indicates that this was generally believed. But these passages, while evidence of popular opinion, throw no light on the main issue. It is admitted by all that for legal and public purposes Jesus was considered as the son of Joseph.

The Problem of the Genealogies

This admission has a bearing on the next point—the question of the genealogies in Matt. i. 1–17 and Luke iii. 23–38. These genealogies are gravely at variance: they do not even agree about the name of Joseph's father. More serious is the fact that they trace the descent of Jesus through Joseph when we might have expected that all the stress would be on His descent through Mary, of whose descent nothing is recorded. It is strongly argued that the compilers of these genealogies could not possibly have been acquainted with the Virgin Birth tradition. The insertion "as was supposed" in Luke iii. 23 looks like an editorial note, while the Matthæan genealogy is perfectly consistent with the view that Jesus was normally born. On the other side, it is

argued that technically and legally Jesus was the son of Joseph, and as such inherited the honours of David's line. I content myself with mentioning that the language of Jesus Himself in Mark xii. 35-37 seems clearly to imply that the scribes were wrong in thinking that the Christ must needs be David's son: Jesus never laid any stress on His Davidic descent, and in this passage conveys the idea that He regarded such a consideration as irrelevant. It is unnecessary to say that His followers did not take this view—cf. Acts ii. 30; Rom. i. 3. Even so, it is not easy to think of Peter and Paul as stressing a Davidic descent which rested on what we should call a legal fiction, and it is not unnatural to infer that these eminent apostles must have been unaware of the Virgin Birth.

General Independence of the Narratives

The independence of the genealogies prepares us for the realization of the fact that the Matthæan and Lucan narratives of the Nativity are independent throughout. On the one side it is maintained that they are mutually complementary, and on the other side it is

argued that they are utterly incapable of being reconciled with one another. Even the most ardent defenders of tradition admit that they are full of difficulties. But they plead that the narratives agree on the essential facts, and that the differences may be explained by supposing that Matthew preserves the version of Joseph and Luke that of Mary. Attention is called to the extremely Hebraic character of both the narratives: they must have come from Palestinian sources, and are therefore presumably of an early date. The opponents of the tradition point out that the narratives abound in angelic appearances, inspired dreams and mysterious portents, and affirm that it is quite impossible for the modern mind to regard these stories as anything but poetic. It is answered that those who believe that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and the Saviour of the world will have no difficulty in believing that He came into the world in a miraculous way, and that His birth was accompanied by signs and wonders: they allege that the negative school of criticism is inspired by a rooted hostility to the supernatural and by an *a priori* determination to eliminate from the sources everything that would exalt

Jesus above the normal possibilities of human experience. On the one hand, we are told that to take these stories as history is to manifest a credulity only possible in minds dominated by dogmatic presuppositions; on the other hand, we are told that the denial of their historicity exhibits a scepticism only possible in minds controlled by the presuppositions of a rationalistic philosophy. I am not intending to enter on a discussion of these rather futile assertions and recriminations; rather would I invite you to an impartial consideration of the evidence available. I think, however, it is fair to say that a goodly number of Christian scholars who are strongly in agreement with the evangelical Christology and not chargeable with general hostility to the supernatural have nevertheless arrived at the conclusion that the evidence is insufficient to justify the traditional view. Whether this is really the case we must decide for ourselves. It can at least be urged that no one has a right to express any opinion one way or the other unless and until he has examined the matter for himself, and learned what is to be said on both sides of the argument.

The Sinaitic-Syriac Readings

I have already referred to the genealogies and the discrepancies between them. But one point remains to be mentioned. In 1893 the text was published of the Sinaitic-Syriac version of the Four Gospels, discovered in the previous year by Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson at a monastery on Mount Sinai. This MS. is generally held to be the earliest Syriac version, and the text is assigned to the fourth century A.D. In this text Matt. i. 16 reads: "Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus, who is called the Christ." Matt. i. 21 makes the angel's message to Joseph read: "She shall bear to thee a son"; and Matt. i. 25 reads: "And she bore to him a son . . ." inserting "to him" and leaving out the words in the usual version which imply that Joseph's wife remained a virgin until Jesus was actually born. It is only fair to mention that this MS. nevertheless contains in Matt. i. 18 a clear statement that Jesus was *not* conceived in the normal way, so the narrative is inconsistent with itself. The vital passage in Luke is wanting in this MS. We cannot say that the MS. is the work of a

heretic who denied the Virgin Birth ; rather may we surmise that the scribe was a quite orthodox person who nevertheless had enough conscience to reproduce with accuracy passages that he must have disliked. But this does not settle the question as to how the unorthodox variants originated. The opponents of tradition argue that the variants prove that the original text of Matthew described Jesus as being naturally born : they contend that the passages which imply the contrary are interpolated. The defenders of tradition dilate on the absurdity of accepting readings on the authority of one MS. in the teeth of the unanimous testimony of all the other MSS. and Versions : they say that at some time or other the Sinaitic-Syriac text must have been tampered with by a heretic who denied the Virgin Birth, as we know that some heretics did—notably the Ebionites and the Gnostic Cerinthus. But some defenders of tradition are inclined to admit that the new reading of Matt. i. 16 may be right, and also that the "as was supposed" in Luke iii. 23 is probably a later addition ; they turn the point of their admission by saying that the genealogies refer only to legal parentage, being compiled for

legal purposes only. Of course the importance of this discussion arises from the fact that the new readings do seem to lend some colour to the theory that the story of the Virgin Birth was no part of the original evangelic "deposit," but emerged later, either through Mary at last breaking her silence and revealing her secret, or through the spontaneous growth of legend.

Are the Narratives Inconsistent or Complementary?

Let us look now at the main narratives. Here we are at once confronted by the amazing fact that Matthew does not mention any of the events recorded in Luke, with the vital exception of the central statement that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Mary the Virgin, wife of Joseph, who had become a mother through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit (Matt. i. 18–25; Luke i. 26–38). On the other hand, Luke does not mention any of the events recorded in Matthew, apart from the central statement. The defenders of the tradition explain this by saying that Matthew is manifestly reproducing Joseph's

version of events, while Luke reproduces Mary's. They add that the general independence of the narratives enormously strengthens their credibility in regard to the matter on which their testimony agrees. The opponents of the tradition contend that the narratives are mutually inconsistent to a degree that makes it impossible to regard either as serious history: the mere fact that two cycles of legend happen to overlap at one point cannot rightly alter our impression of their general character.

Apparent Inconsistency as Bethlehem and Nazareth

The first discrepancy that attracts attention is that Matthew seems to regard Bethlehem as the original abode of Joseph and Mary. The Holy Family only settled in Nazareth after the return from Egypt. Their first intention was to return to Bethlehem, but Joseph is represented as hesitating to do so on account of Archelaus, Herod's son, being ruler in Judæa. His perplexities are resolved by a dream in which he is directed to turn his steps towards Galilee. He then—apparently for the

first time—settles with his family in Nazareth. Matthew appends a prophecy which cannot be traced—"He shall be called a Nazarene." Some critics see in this an allusion to Judg. xiii. 5, while others think there is implied a paronomasia on the Hebrew of Isa. xi. 1.

Now Luke is perfectly clear on the point that Joseph and Mary were originally resident in Nazareth. They only repair to Bethlehem on account of the census: humanly speaking, it was only an accident which caused Jesus to be born in David's city. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary fulfil all legal requirements—apparently at their leisure—and then return to their own home, which they subsequently leave once a year in order to accomplish the Passover in the capital. The Lucan account says nothing about any peril arising from the malice of Herod, still less does it allude to the Massacre of the Innocents. It seems to exclude the Flight into Egypt and a prolonged sojourn there, for we can discover no hiatus in the very circumstantial account in Luke. Matthew, on the other hand, seems to exclude the narrative in Luke ii. 21 ff.: if the Holy Child was in imminent danger from Herod, Jerusalem was the last place for His

parents to visit, nor would the precipitate flight into Egypt leave time for such a visit, even if it were otherwise credible.

The Census Question

There has been considerable debate about the census mentioned in Luke ii. It is not denied that periodic censuses were taken within the bounds of the Empire. We also know that Quirinius was Governor of Syria in A.D. 6 and conducted a local census—including a valuation—for taxation purposes. It was this census which led to the revolt of Judas of Galilee—cf. Acts v. 37. Luke may have had this census in mind when he refers to the earlier census as "the first enrolment made when Quirinius was Governor of Syria." Ramsay has also proved that Quirinius was engaged in military operations on the borders of Syria about 11–7 B.C., and has shown that he was very likely called "Governor" (*Legatus*), though another Governor—one Sentius Saturninus—was also in office (cf. Josephus and Tertullian). So it looks as though there is nothing to prevent our accepting the statement about Quirinius

and agreeing that the census really took place in his time.

Nor can it be denied that the census might have extended to the semi-independent kingdom of Judæa. Herod was no more free to disregard the injunctions of Augustus than the Nizam of Hadarabad to disregard the injunctions of the King-Emperor. Luke does not state that the census was made on the Roman plan or by Roman officials: presumably it was conducted in a fashion that did not arouse the intense national resentment excited by the Roman census in A.D. 6. The desire to conciliate Jewish feeling is held to explain the strange requirement that Jews should resort to their tribal cities in order to be enrolled—the time of the census being extended over a whole year in order to facilitate the numerous pilgrimages thus involved. The opponents of tradition say that Luke puts the whole population in motion for no other purpose than to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. They urge that it is ridiculous to imagine that people would be required to attend for enrolment at the dwelling-places of their remote ancestors. And if Joseph was bound to attend at the village which his

illustrious progenitor had quitted a thousand years before, is it likely that he would have been compelled to take Mary with him in the condition in which she was? Surely such a remarkable census would have left some traces on secular history!

I must not spend more time on the census: it is a most complicated question. I only record my personal view that the Lucan account, while beset with difficulties, is not incredible. But the fact remains that Luke clearly represents Nazareth as the real abode of the Holy Family, even prior to the birth of Jesus, while Matthew seems to imply that they only settled in Nazareth at a period considerably subsequent to that event.

What Happened after the Birth of Jesus?

The second discrepancy has already been touched on—the difficulty of reconciling the two narratives in regard to what happened immediately after the birth of Jesus. The opponents of tradition allege that the flight into Egypt is a legend which grew up round the supposed Messianic prophecy in Hos. xi. 1,

which prophecy really refers to Israel and the Exodus. The story is closely connected with the narrative about the Magi, which Luke might have been expected to refer to, if he had had any inkling of it, for it would suit the Gentile interest that pervades his narrative. This story is in turn associated with a tale about a wondrous star which excited no difficulty in an age when scientific astronomy was unknown and all kinds of astrological superstitions were rampant, but which the modern mind naturally regards with considerable scepticism. All kinds of questions arise about the star. We wonder how it came about that the Magi—whoever they were and wherever they lived—were able to identify the star as having any reference to the "King of the Jews." We notice that the star seems to have disappeared before the pilgrims from the East arrived at Jerusalem, thus involving the necessity of inquiries that were bound to prove perilous. Matt. ii. 9 refers to the miraculous reappearance of the star when the pilgrims resumed their journey: it also states that the star guided them to the exact spot. Defenders of the tradition naturally point out that believers in the miraculous birth of

the Son of God will have little difficulty in believing in the miraculous star, in spite of all these perplexities. It certainly seems regrettable that the star should have failed for part of the journey: one infers from the narrative that, if this had not occurred, Herod would never have known of what was happening, and the lives of the Bethlehem infants would have been saved. With reference to this part of the narrative, it may be observed that we know enough of Herod's character to believe that he would have had no scruple in removing any possible claimant to his blood-stained throne, or in massacring any number of infants in order to ensure this end, though secular history makes no allusion to this particular atrocity. Defenders of the tradition lay much stress on the difficulty of believing that pious imagination would go to such a length as to blacken the memory even of a monster like Herod. They urge that, whatever else in the narratives can be fairly termed poetic, such a description cannot apply to this massacre story; they further maintain that we cannot accept the tale of the massacre without accepting the tale of the Magi with which it is so intimately associated,

while the same argument applies to the story of the flight into Egypt. All these things must be taken into consideration.

The Misgivings of Joseph

A third difficulty is in connection with the misgivings of Joseph about Mary. Luke tells us that the angel Gabriel visited Mary before her conception and prepared her for all that was to happen. This intimation was confirmed by the prophetic utterance of Elisabeth. Naturally Luke says nothing about any misgivings on the part of Joseph. Mary would presumably inform Joseph, if she informed no one else: such a communication would be vital to her own interest, and Joseph would surely have a clear right to be told. Nor had she been bound to secrecy on the subject: there is no suggestion of this in Luke. Yet Matthew represents Joseph as taking the worst view of Mary's condition, though inclined to the most merciful course of action that this view permitted. He was only induced to refrain from unwitting injustice by an angel appearing to him in a dream and dissipating his misgivings. One might have thought that

Mary would have explained matters before they reached this climax: in any case, it might be expected that Joseph would ask for an explanation, even if an explanation had not been previously volunteered. But in Matthew, Mary plays a purely passive part. Joseph is favoured with no less than four inspired dreams—i. 20, ii. 13, 19, 22—three of which are specifically connected with angelic manifestations. In Luke, Mary has a considerable conversation with the angel Gabriel, as does Zacharias the priest in the passage immediately preceding. The shepherds also receive an angelic message, supplemented by the songs of a whole choir of angels. But nothing is said of any manifestation to Joseph. It may indeed be urged that Joseph would probably not be inclined to believe Mary's statement, any more than a modern husband would be likely to do, and that on this account he would need a supplementary and confirmatory revelation in order that he might know the truth. But there is no hint of this in Matthew, though I do not know of any better way of harmonizing the two narratives.

Possible Pagan Influence on the Tradition

Various attempts have been made to explain the Birth stories on the assumption that they are myths. It has been pointed out that pagan mythology and even Buddhist mythology contain narratives bearing some resemblance to those in the Gospels. Demigods and heroes were often believed to have been born in miraculous fashion, and it was often believed also that their advent was signalized by astronomical portents and other disturbances of the natural order. It cannot be said that the effort to connect the Gospel traditions with any of these cycles of legend has been successful. One obvious difficulty in the way of such attempts is that the stories in the Gospels are so strikingly Hebraic in texture: they are, with the possible exception of parts of the Apocalypse, the most Hebraic parts of the New Testament. Now we know that pious Jews—and of course Jewish Christians also—had a most intense dislike of heathenism and all its works. Is it then probable that the tradition would borrow from

tainted sources? On the other hand, if we admit the unlikelihood of conscious borrowing, we have still to face the possibility that the tendencies we see operating in the making of legends elsewhere may also have operated in primitive Christian circles. It is at least highly probable that some of the Old Testament stories—e.g. the Creation and Flood stories—are drawn from the same original sources as the Babylonian legends, if they have not been directly borrowed from Babylon, while Jewish thought about angels and demons is believed to owe much to Persian influence. I state the facts, and leave the reader to form what inferences he can.

Possible Influence of Messianic Prophecy

Another theory of the origin of the Birth stories affirms that they grew up around certain Old Testament prophecies which the early Christians, rightly or wrongly, took to be Messianic. It is argued that there was a tendency to adapt the traditions of the life of Jesus with a view to meeting the requirements of prophecy, and it is further argued

that on occasion the traditions might be moulded as well as modified under this influence. This need not have involved conscious fabrication. Pious souls, fervently persuaded of the Messiahship of Jesus, took it for granted that in the life of Jesus the Messianic prophecies must have been fulfilled. This theory is most applicable to Matthew, who is obviously keen to emphasize the connection between the various incidents of the tradition and the Old Testament passages in question. Matthew has no less than five references to prophecy in the first two chapters of his narrative. The contention is that the Old Testament texts created the New Testament traditions, as against the ordinary view that the Old Testament texts are merely brought in by way of pointing the moral and adorning the tale. I am bound to say that the former theory seems scarcely satisfactory, for the simple reason that the connection between the stories and the Old Testament quotations is as a rule too remote and far-fetched to make it credible. The Jeremiah reference to Rachel weeping for her children is connected in the Old Testament with Ramah, not with Bethlehem, and it is hard to imagine that it led to the

development of a story narrating a massacre in Bethlehem. But the weakest part of the theory is the attempt to explain the Virgin Birth tradition as based on the Isaianic passage, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son." The original Hebrew refers, not to a "virgin," but to "a young woman of marriageable age"; the "virgin" reference arises simply through a mistranslation in the Septuagint. Nor is there the slightest evidence that the passage, either in its Hebrew or in its Greek form, was regarded as Messianic in pre-Christian times, any more than was Isa. liii. It is impossible to prove that the Jews were expecting the Messiah to be born of a virgin: all our information points in the opposite direction. If Christians became convinced that Jesus was indeed thus born, it is easy to understand their discovery of a Messianic reference in the Isaianic text, but it is very hard to believe that the text could have created such an expectation, much less a story to correspond with it. The theory which derives the Birth stories from the Old Testament texts certainly fits in with the Hebraic character of the narratives, which cannot be said of the theory which derives them from

the influence of pagan myths, but it does not strike me as otherwise convincing.

Summary of Results

I sum up this section of the discussion by saying that it seems that the defenders of the tradition have not been very successful in their efforts to reconcile the apparent discrepancies in the narratives themselves, while their opponents have been even less successful in discovering a theory which will satisfactorily account for the stories on the assumption that they are unhistorical. The advanced critics have been strong on the negative side, but they have failed to offer any reconstruction of the facts which seems really convincing. Hence it is scarcely surprising that writers on the conservative side spend much more time on exposing and denouncing the theories of the radical critics than in facing the difficulties of the stories themselves. They seek to compel the reader to the conclusion that, since the rationalizing explanations seem to fail, the only alternative is to take the stories as records of fact.

Theological Bearings of the Question

In conclusion, I must discuss for a few moments the theological bearing of this question. Many people seem to think that belief in the Incarnation and belief in the Virgin Birth are mutually dependent beliefs. Certainly no one is likely now to believe in the Virgin Birth who doesn't believe in the Incarnation, though I may note in passing that the early Unitarians seem to have combined belief in the one with denial of the other. It is fair to say that if we believe in Jesus as Son of God and Saviour of the world we may approach the study of the evidence with a predisposition to believe that so unique an event would most appropriately happen in a unique way. A supernatural Personality, it is said, could not have come into the world except by supernatural means. Hence we are told that the Virgin Birth is an issue vital to Christian faith: it is the buttress on which the whole superstructure rests. The denial of the Virgin Birth is alleged to be prompted, not by purely historical considerations, but by rationalistic presuppositions fatal to the entire Christian view of the universe.

Again, it is urged that the sinlessness of Jesus cannot be accounted for if He were indeed the issue of Adam's tainted line. It is held by many theologians that all children are born in a state of original sin, under the shadow of Adam's transgression : the Virgin Birth was the appointed means of removing Jesus from this position. But on this presupposition it seems to me that the Roman Church is only logical in holding that Mary also must have been immaculately conceived, for surely the taint might be conveyed through the mother just as much as through the father. The weakness of the Roman position seems to lie here : if Mary could be immaculately conceived without being miraculously born, why could not Jesus have been conceived in the same way ? Most of us, I imagine, will not be inclined to accept the theory of Augustine and Calvin that unborn infants are justly liable to the wrath of the Almighty : the whole theory of imputed guilt is historically and psychologically open to the gravest objections, while the modern ethical consciousness is totally revolted by it. But suppose we modify the theory and content ourselves with saying that children are born

with inherited sinful tendencies, which most people will admit to be true. Suppose we say that, in virtue of the Virgin Birth, Jesus was exempt from these tendencies. Here, again, we are faced with the difficulty that they might be transmitted through the mother. If a miracle could prevent such transmission, why should it be argued that nothing could prevent the transmission on the assumption that Jesus was born in the normal way? The only answer I can see to this argument is a simple appeal to faith. But we are not at the end of our difficulties. If Jesus was really tempted, as the Scriptures plainly indicate was the case, does not this imply that He knew, as we know, the presence of tendencies and passions that were liable to stimulation by evil suggestion, tendencies and passions that demanded the utmost effort and the assistance of God's grace for their repression and control? To deny this is to make the moral conflicts of Jesus a series of sham fights, to deprive His example of all moral value, and indeed to empty His humanity of all real significance. To admit this is to give away the argument that Jesus must have been supernaturally born in order to account for His wonderful triumph

over sin. I cannot discuss this subject fully, for it would involve us in the whole problem of the Person of Christ, with which the question of His sinlessness must inevitably be connected.

Is it then true that the central doctrine of the Incarnation depends in any way on the Virgin Birth tradition? If this were so, the absence of any allusion to the tradition in Paul and John seems most remarkable. Undoubtedly they believed in the reality of the Incarnation and held the most exalted estimate of the Person of Christ: if their convictions were vitally associated with the Virgin Birth tradition, their failure to refer to it is inexplicable. There is, indeed, a remarkable contrast between the place of the Virgin Birth in the New Testament and the place of the Resurrection. The Resurrection is included in all four Gospels; it is fundamental to the primitive preaching as recorded in Acts; it is a pivotal doctrine in Paulinism; it may almost be called the necessary presupposition of all Church history. None of these things can be alleged of the Virgin Birth. It may indeed be said that people who believe in the Resurrection should make no difficulty about

believing in the Virgin Birth, but it must be acknowledged that the evidence in favour of the former is much more extensive and imposing than that in favour of the latter—a fact which is not to be minimized by the consideration that this distinction would seem to arise from the nature of the case. Moreover, it is really hard to see why Jesus should be thought of as less than Divine, simply and solely because the Virgin Birth tradition is beset with difficulties and regarded by many as insufficiently attested. The doctrine of the Incarnation rests on what Jesus was, and what He did, and is still doing—on the place He claims and occupies in Christian life and experience; it is the expression of our consciousness of His spiritual status and significance. This is surely independent of any view we may hold as to the circumstances of His entry into the world. At one time it was widely imagined that the Copernican astronomy would be fatal to evangelical truth: more recently it has been feared that evolutionism would be the death of religion: some people say that Christianity cannot survive the denial of the historicity of Gen. i.-ii. But experience has proved and is proving that these notions

are unduly pessimistic. Hence it seems reasonable to ask for proof of the assertion that the Virgin Birth tradition is fundamental to "the truth as it is in Jesus." It would be wrong lightly to reject the tradition: a tradition that has so long a history and so many beautiful and tender associations deserves the most reverent regard. My task has been simply to state the evidence and call attention to the difficulties, duly noting all that can be said on both sides. But I hope we shall realize that this subject is not so absolutely fundamental as is often imagined. If you think the evidence adequate and the difficulties not too great—if you feel that the tradition helps in the understanding of Jesus and in living the Christian life—by all means accept it and hold to it. If you think otherwise, you can at least say that, in being loyal to the best light you have, you are being loyal to the essential spirit of Jesus, nor need you abandon the faith which sees in Jesus the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

VI

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

I BEGAN the discussion on the Virgin Birth by commenting on the limited extent of the evidence available. No such comment is possible in connection with the Resurrection. All four Gospels have important contributions to offer: there is ample evidence that the Resurrection stood in the forefront of the primitive preaching; it occupies a vital and even a central place in the thought of Paul. No one who accepts the Virgin Birth is likely to have any insuperable difficulty about the Resurrection: it is also fair to note that many who doubt or reject the Virgin Birth hold strongly to the traditional view regarding the Resurrection. It is widely believed that Paul was perfectly right in his famous affirmation: "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain." Many who are prepared to treat the Virgin Birth as an

open question are not prepared to treat the Resurrection in the same way. It therefore behoves us to discuss the subject with a due sense of its importance.

On the other hand, it is vain to deny that serious difficulties exist, which difficulties intelligent Christians must be prepared to face. There are difficulties inherent in any record purporting to narrate "miraculous" occurrences, by which I mean occurrences outside our present range of experience and apparently involving the suspension or supersession of what we call "natural laws." Our experience is indeed limited, and it is eminently likely that our knowledge of "natural laws" is by no means complete. A sensible man will think twice before he declares anything "impossible." But a sensible man, while aware of the limitations of human experience and human knowledge, is also aware of the existence of human credulity. Even to-day we have ample evidence of the tendency of many people to folly and superstition—a tendency by no means confined to churchgoers. It is well-known that in the pre-scientific era the most astounding legends found wide currency and easy acceptance.

Now in the ancient world we can discern ample evidence of progress in many departments of civilization and culture—in art and literature, in philosophy and religion. But it cannot be pretended that the ancient world possessed anything corresponding to that vast array of co-ordinated and verified knowledge which we call "Science." The critical study of literature and history had hardly begun to exist: there could be little advance in this direction so long as the human mind was dominated by the imaginations of a crude supernaturalism. In the simplest experiences were discerned the workings of divine or demonic agencies: the universe was peopled with spiritual presences: what we should call miracles were frequently reported and rarely disbelieved.

Now it cannot be doubted that the New Testament writers and the early Christians generally shared in the mental habits and tendencies of their age and environment. Stories that seem perplexing and even incredible to most moderns were received by them without doubt or difficulty. Of course they recognized a distinction between fact and fiction: the New Testament contains many exhortations to truthfulness in word

and deed—the case of Ananias and Sapphira is a striking, if somewhat gruesome, illustration. No serious critic would contend that any one of the New Testament traditions is the product of conscious fabrication. Least of all is it likely that the Resurrection stories emanated from deceivers. There is no possibility of thinking that the early Christians were anything but absolutely and honestly convinced of the truth of the Resurrection: liars are not the stuff that martyrs are made of. But it is equally absurd to credit the early Christians with faculties of criticism that were then undeveloped: we cannot imagine that they made investigations in what we should call a scientific and critical spirit. We know from common experience how stories grow, how easy it is for embellishment and exaggeration to creep in, even when there is no suspicion of deliberate untruthfulness. Especially is this the case when the emotions are strongly excited and patriotic or religious interests involved. It is, therefore, often contended that the Resurrection stories are the products of faith. The followers of Jesus could not believe that Calvary was the end of Him: they were on the look-out for mani-

festations of His triumphant survival. Hence they were in a mood to dream dreams and see visions: the wish was father to the thought and even to the legend. Instead of the facts creating the faith, the faith created the alleged facts.

This hallucination theory is exposed to very serious objections. It presupposes that the faith preceded the visions, whereas all the evidence asserts the converse. The narratives differ in many ways, but they all agree that after the Crucifixion the disciples were in a state of utter despair. Not only were they not expecting the Resurrection, but they were very reluctant to believe in the people who affirmed its actuality. I confess that it is not easy to reconcile this with the accounts which represent Jesus as repeatedly and circumstantially predicting what is said to have occurred: I incline to the view that these predictions cannot have been as clear as the accounts would suggest. It seems difficult to accept Matthew's theory that the Pharisees remembered what the disciples completely forgot. But there is really no ground for the supposition that the disciples were in such a condition of spiritual exaltation after the

tragedy of Calvary that they were psychologically prepared for the subsequent manifestations. Most serious of all is the objection that, on this theory, the mightiest and most beneficent religious movement that the world has ever seen originated in the fevered imagination of a little group of ignorant and unlearned men and women. If Christianity originated in an illusion it seems hard to believe in its essential truth, or indeed in the essential truthfulness of the universe in which we live. For these reasons the hallucination theory is now often abandoned, even by critics who cannot be suspected of any leaning towards orthodoxy.

Another theory, which is much more popular, admits both the honesty of the disciples and the actuality of the visions. It admits that the visions were not merely subjective: it owns that they were actual manifestations of Him Who had been crucified. Thus it acknowledges that the Resurrection narratives are founded on a great fact. The spirit of Jesus survived the cross and triumphed over the tomb: in a way that transcends our comprehension He revealed Himself to His perplexed and discouraged disciples, changing their gloom

to joy, their doubt to assurance, their fear to courage. But the advocates of this theory find it impossible to believe in the empty tomb: they say that the Easter Faith can be and must be detached from the naïve belief that the body of Jesus was actually resuscitated. It is not unfair to say that they regard the visions as a series of transcendent spiritualistic manifestations.

This theory seems to have certain advantages. It provides an historical basis for the stories that have come down to us; it explains the wonderful transformation in the disciples which made the Christian Church possible; it involves no offence to Christian experience. Yet it relieves us from the necessity of believing in a physical resuscitation and from the apparent difficulties involved therein. On the other hand, it has difficulties of its own. It clashes with a mass of testimony which very definitely connects the faith of the disciples, not only with a series of visions, but with the discovery that the tomb was empty. Unlike the Greeks, the Jews were disinclined to believe in the immortality of the soul apart from the resurrection of the body—an observation which applies with special force to the

Palestinian Jews. It may indeed be said that the tradition may have inferred the fact of the empty tomb from the experience of the visions, but this hardly satisfies the statements which represent this as verified by actual investigation. Furthermore, this theory leaves us face to face with phenomena that until recently would certainly have been called miraculous, and which are in any case exceedingly perplexing. If the transcendent Personality of Jesus was able to become manifest in the form of visions—*i.e.* to become in some way objectified to the senses—why should we deny on purely *a priori* grounds that so transcendent a Personality might reanimate and at the same time transform the body of His humiliation? If Jesus could become visible on the third day, why need we deny that He might have become tangible? I confess that I am not aware of any convincing answer to these questions.

I now proceed to consider the traditional view. Let me begin by pointing out that this view cannot escape from the necessity of vindicating itself historically. It is common for its defenders to make appeal to Christian experience as proving that the Gospel stories and the Pauline testimonies are to be literally

accepted. I think such an appeal invalid. Christian experience does, I think, prove that the spirit of the Lord Jesus triumphed over sin and death: those of us who believe in the Living Christ and in the vital connection between the Living Christ and the historic Jesus need no convincing on this point. To me this is the point that really matters most. But I must say that I cannot understand how the spiritual experience of Christians can possibly be conclusive as to the actual method by which this faith was created in the souls of the first disciples. Spiritual experience may convince us of the essential truth of Christianity as a spiritual faith, but in the nature of the case it cannot be the arbitrator on matters of historical controversy. It may predispose us to certain conclusions, but that is all. In my own case it certainly predisposes me to believe things about Jesus that I could not believe about any one else—*i.e.* it creates in my mind a certain presumption in favour of the tradition. But ultimately we have to settle down to a study of the evidence, and to this we now proceed.

The earliest evidence is that of 1 Cor. xv. The epistle is undoubtedly a genuine work of

the apostle and dates somewhere about A.D. 55—i.e. it was written some twenty-five years after the Crucifixion. Paul expressly states that the majority of the witnesses appealed to by him are still surviving. It seems that the reference to the Resurrection was occasioned by the fact that certain of the Corinthian Christians doubted or denied the resurrection of the dead. I am not sure that they denied the immortality of the soul: I hardly think so. But to the Jewish mind of Paul this denial of the one was tantamount to the denial of the other: whatever the Corinthians may have thought, he was quite unable to conceive of souls persisting in a naked or disembodied state. He therefore reaffirms the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and expounds it at some length. Much discussion has taken place as to what exactly Paul meant, but I think he is fairly clear. He seems to have believed that the body of our humiliation will be raised at the Last Day and be reunited with the spirit: what happens to the spirit in the meantime is not definitely indicated—apparently it is in what we should call a state of suspended animation. Two points seem to emerge from Paul's argument—

(1) That the body which is buried is in some sense identical with the body which is raised ; (2) that at the time of the Resurrection it will be miraculously transformed, and—so to speak—transubstantiated. Certainly it will no longer be "flesh and blood," nor will it be "corruptible."

Now the whole point of Paul's citation of the Resurrection of Jesus seems to be in the fact that he judges that the Resurrection of Jesus is a true prototype of the resurrection of believers : I have no hesitation in thinking it perfectly legitimate to conceive that Paul thought of the Resurrection of Jesus in exactly the same way as he thought of the resurrection of believers. This involves two conclusions—(1) That Paul believed in the empty tomb ; (2) that he conceived of the Body of the Risen Lord as etherealized and glorified—no longer "flesh and blood "—in direct opposition to Luke xxiv. 39.

Another very important point that emerges from 1 Cor. xv. is that the Corinthian Christians, whatever other doubts they may have had, were quite orthodox on the question of the Resurrection of Jesus. Paul mentions the latter simply by way of illustrating and enforc-

ing his argument on the disputed point of the resurrection of believers. It is not unlikely that Paul thought the heresy at Corinth might develop into a denial of the Resurrection of Jesus: this would account for his reiteration of the evidence in favour of the latter. But the passage as it stands is proof conclusive not only of the faith of the apostle, but of the faith of the Corinthians, and indeed of the general belief of Christians at the time. It accords perfectly with the tradition of the empty tomb, but seems rather out of harmony with what I may call the more materialistic elements in the Gospel narratives. The passage seems clear enough in affirming that the body that was buried was the body that was raised: indeed this seems implied in the very word "resurrection." Granting that the term *might* be applied to a spirit rising from the dark underworld of Sheol to the upper regions of life and light, the context here seems fatal to such an interpretation.

Let us now look at Paul's list of "appearances"—to (1) Cephas, (2) the Twelve, (3) above five hundred brethren at once, (4) James, (5) all the apostles, (6) himself. Paul does not definitely state that his list is ex-

haustive, but the casual reader would certainly think it was. The most extraordinary thing about this list is the omission of any reference to the women. Matthew records an appearance to the two Maries, and John an appearance to Mary Magdalene, which may possibly be variant forms of one tradition. The genuine Mark seems rather to negative any appearances to the women. Hence the silence of Paul and Mark—the earliest witnesses—has led many to conclude that the stories about appearances to the women are a later embellishment of the narrative. On the other hand, it is truly said that Mark's account is incomplete, while Paul might have refrained from mentioning appearances to women in view of his intense dislike for certain manifestations of feminist spirit which had occurred in the Corinthian Church. I am not myself much impressed by these arguments.

The appearance to Cephas may be plausibly identified with that appearance to Simon incidentally mentioned in Luke xxiv. 34. That to the Twelve—*i.e.* the Eleven—immediately follows in Luke; an appearance to the Eleven in Galilee is also recorded in Matthew. Possibly, however, this latter occasion is

covered by the reference to the five hundred brethren, though Matthew only mentions the Eleven. The appearance to the five hundred may also be conceivably identified with that recorded in Acts i. The appearance to all the apostles may plausibly be connected with one or other of these occasions. The appearance to James is not mentioned in the Gospels, but need occasion no real difficulty. The appearance to Peter is only incidentally mentioned by Luke. It seems clear that Paul leaves out several appearances mentioned in the Gospels, which is rather surprising, and inserts at least one appearance to which the Gospels do not refer. Note also that he equates the appearance to himself on the Damascus road with the other appearances, which strengthens our conviction that he did not regard the Risen Body as "flesh and blood"—*i.e.* as subject to the normal limitations of material existence—it was a "heavenly" or "ethereal" body.

Let us now look at the Gospel narratives. Mark unfortunately fails us at xvi. 8, but it is fairly clear that his original ending recounted appearances to the disciples in Galilee, and in all probability a special appearance to Peter.

Certain it is that Mark bears witness to the empty tomb. His account is perfectly straightforward and fairly self-consistent, though of course it involves the supernatural.

1. Who went to the tomb? Mark says the two Maries and Salome: Matthew mentions only the two Maries: Luke mentions the two Maries, Joanna, and other women. These may fairly be described as minor differences.

2. When did they go? Mark says "when the Sabbath was past"—*i.e.* when shopping was possible—they bought spices—and that "very early on the first day of the week," "just after sunrise," they came to the tomb. Matthew says "late on the Sabbath"—"as the first day of the week began to dawn," etc. The former phrase is perplexing, as the day was usually reckoned from "sunset to sunset," but perhaps Matthew is reckoning from "sunrise to sunrise," which appears to have been the secular as distinct from the religious reckoning. Luke says "on the first day of the week—at early dawn." The accounts are fairly well agreed.

3. Why did they go? Mark and Luke say that they went to anoint the body—an office

of love which had been necessarily neglected in the hurried circumstances of the burial. Matthew merely says that they went to look at the tomb. His omission of all reference to the proposed anointing is due to his story about the sealing of the tomb and the setting of the guard, which is manifestly inconsistent with such a project being even contemplated. Matthew's idea that they went to see the tomb seems rather difficult to credit: the women, according to him, ran a terrible risk at the hands of the soldiers for no adequate reason. The whole story of the guard is full of difficulties and is widely regarded as a later addition to the main narrative. It may have been prompted by the desire to refute the absurd legend about the disciples stealing the body by night. We may therefore assume that Mark and Luke are correct in their explanation of the purpose of the women's visit.

4. What about the great stone? Mark says that the women wondered, saying, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"—a query otherwise unrecorded. Why the women had not considered this difficulty beforehand is not indicated. One would have imagined that they would natur-

ally have appealed to Joseph of Arimathæa, or brought some male friends with them to assist in removing the stone. It seems as though they relied on the help of chance passers-by—a very dubious procedure. But there is no need to lay stress on this matter. It is quite possible that in their loving zeal the women overlooked the difficulty referred to.

5. What happened at the tomb? Mark and Luke say that the women entered the tomb, having found the stone already rolled away. Luke adds that they were perplexed at not finding the body. Presumably their first impulse would be to think it had been removed by Jesus' enemies. Mark says they saw "a young man"—evidently an angel, judging from the description. Luke says they saw "two men"—also evidently angels. Matthew has previously mentioned an earthquake, and told how an angel descended from heaven, rolled away the stone, and sat on it. He tells us of the terror of the watchers, who, however, play no further part in the drama at the tomb. Matthew does not say that the women beheld these wonders: nor does it seem likely that he would get information from the Roman soldiers. Many scholars

think that this part of the Matthæan story is a legendary expansion. Matthew indicates that the angel was outside the tomb, whereas Mark and Luke refer to an angelic appearance inside the tomb. Matthew agrees with Mark against Luke as to there being only one angel. Matthew seems to imply that the women did not enter the tomb at all. These divergences are curious, but not vitally important: they are the kind of divergences that naturally arise in independent traditions.

6. What was the content of the angelic message? On this all the Synoptics are substantially agreed, though their reports differ in verbal form. "Don't be afraid: you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He is risen: he is not here: see the place where they laid him"—so runs Mark. Matthew adds "as he said" to the words "he is risen"—apparently rather reproaching the women for their forgetfulness of Jesus' prophecies. The vital words "He is not here" are exactly reproduced in all. Luke's account is more stately and includes the great passage, "Why seek you the living one among the dead ones?" Mark goes on to recount that the angel told the women to

tell the disciples and Peter, and instruct them to proceed to Galilee, where they would see the Risen Lord, "even as he said." Matthew substantially agrees, leaving out the reference to Peter. Luke, however, confines this part of the message to a simple reminder of the detailed prophecy made by Jesus "while he was yet in Galilee." The reference to Galilee remains, but its context is vitally altered, evidently to fit in with Luke's version which dealt only with appearances in Jerusalem. There can be no doubt as to the originality of the Marcan version.

7. What did the women do? Mark says that they said nothing to any one, because they were afraid. They would seem to have disobeyed the heavenly vision. Matthew says they ran to announce the news to the disciples with which Luke agrees in substance. Here we seem to have a direct contradiction between Mark on the one hand and Matthew and Luke on the other. Possibly, if we had the continuation of Mark, the contradiction would be cleared up.

8. What happened on the way from the tomb? Matthew is alone in recording that Jesus Himself appeared to the women on the

way back from the tomb and greeted them. They drew near and took Him by the feet and worshipped Him (cp. John xx. 17): evidently the Resurrection body is conceived as being substantial and tangible—not a mere vision. Jesus is represented as reiterating the angelic command to go to Galilee and the promise of further manifestations there. This seems rather to negative the Lucan account, which confines the manifestations to Jerusalem. Luke xxiv. 22, 23 seems formally to negative the Matthew story of an appearance to the women.

This is as far as we can go with the three Synoptics, for Mark breaks off, and the subsequent accounts of Matthew and Luke are utterly independent. But we may at this point draw the Fourth Gospel into comparison. John states that the body of Jesus was anointed by Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus prior to the burial—a statement that seems at variance with the implications of the Synoptists. We can only reconcile the two stories by supposing that the women wished to give the body a supplementary anointing. John says nothing about this. He tells of Mary Magdalene going early to the tomb—

apparently alone—and finding it empty. She tells Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. They verify her statement about the tomb and then go home. Mary remains, and, looking into the tomb, sees two angels, a feature which reminds us of Luke. On her first visit no angelic manifestation is mentioned. On this second occasion she sees not only the angels, but also the Risen Lord, whom she mistakes for the gardener. I pass over the beautiful recognition scene to note the command, "Touch me not." This is in flat contradiction to the Matthew story already considered, in which the women take Jesus by the feet. Later in the Johannine narrative, Thomas is expressly invited to touch the Risen Lord. Connecting this with the language of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the garden, we come to the conclusion that John implies that the Ascension had taken place between these two appearances, which is rather confirmed by John's omission of any other reference to the Ascension story. We may further note that John represents Mary as telling the disciples of her experience, a statement which supports Matthew and Luke against Mark on this point. I need hardly say that the difficulty of fitting

John's narrative into the Synoptic framework is enormous. It is next to impossible to secure a clear and convincing reconstruction of the events of that memorable morning. But all four narratives agree on the central point that the tomb was empty and the Lord risen.

We must now draw rapidly to a close. Matthew's final contribution to the account is a statement that the eleven disciples went to Galilee and saw Jesus at the rendezvous appointed. With this is associated the strange statement that "some doubted," which looks like a fragment of genuine tradition. At least it tells against the theory that the disciples were *expecting* the Resurrection. But it clashes with the notion of previous appearances in Jerusalem! The Great Commission, with its Trinitarian Formula, is difficult, if only because the Baptismal Formula in Acts is simply "into the name of Jesus," and the Trinitarian Formula only came into use later (*cp. Didaché*, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, Dionysius). It is hard to believe that, if the formula had been enjoined in its Trinitarian form by Jesus Himself under circumstances of such solemnity, it would not have been

employed from the beginning. Matthew has no Ascension story: he breaks off with the promise of the Lord's perpetual presence.

Matthew has recounted no appearances in Jerusalem, except the one to the women. It is very unlikely that originally Mark recounted any appearances in Jerusalem at all. But Luke recounts nothing else. We have the appearance on the Emmaus road, with its representation of the mysterious vanishing of the Risen Lord. We have also a reference to an appearance to Simon, which seems to have been nearly contemporaneous with that on the Emmaus road. Clearly enough the Risen Lord is superior to all the normal limitations of material existence. He is now represented as appearing to the Eleven, even while the Emmaus travellers were recounting their experiences. Moreover, He tells them that He is not "a spirit," but has "flesh and bones," and demonstrates the fact by eating before them. The difficulty of reconciling this decidedly materialistic representation with the extraordinary powers already referred to needs no emphasis. Then follows Luke's version of the Great Commission—coupled with a command to tarry in the city. The Ascension

story follows, located at Bethany. Luke's account is remarkable for two things—(1) It seems to be inconsistent with any appearances in Galilee; (2) it seems, at first sight, to represent all the events recorded as succeeding one another in rapid sequence and all taking place on one day. If Matthew and Luke had written to contradict one another, they could not have done so more effectually.

The Acts account seems to correct the Third Gospel on one point: it represents the appearances as spread over forty days instead of giving the impression that they were confined to one day. But it is just as emphatic as the Third Gospel about the appearances being in Jerusalem and not in Galilee. It also offers an elaborated version of the Ascension story. This story presented no difficulty to people who believed in a heaven above the sky, but it has difficulties for modern people which take some removing. A simple explanation is to regard the Ascension story as a pictorial way of recording the fact that after a certain period the visions ceased, which was naturally interpreted as meaning that the Risen Christ had ascended to His Glory in heaven—an idea that the Jewish mind equated with the thought

of a literal ascent to the celestial region beyond the starry firmament.

The account in the Fourth Gospel, in addition to the appearances to Mary Magdalene, recounts two appearances to the disciples—evidently in Jerusalem. The second appearance is especially connected with Thomas, who was not present on the first occasion and was reluctant to believe until he had proved for himself the materiality of the Risen Body. Here, again, we have the curious representation of a Body at once capable of being touched and handled and at the same time capable of passing unhindered through closed doors. Most remarkable is the record of the gift of the Holy Spirit as being conferred on the former of these occasions, which seems to conflict with Luke xxiv. 49 and the Acts account which represents the gift of the Holy Spirit as postponed to the Day of Pentecost. The words subsequently attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are connected by Matthew with Jesus's Galilean ministry (Matt. xvi. 19, xviii. 18).

The Fourth Gospel really ends at xx. 31, as

any one can see, but there is an appendix, which may possibly have been added by the author himself. This recounts a third appearance to the disciples—or rather to seven of them. The disciples have returned to Galilee and resumed their ordinary avocations, which squares with the implications of Mark and the statements of Matthew, but is hard to reconcile with the Jerusalem accounts in Luke and Acts, supported hitherto by the Fourth Gospel. The story of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes reminds us strongly of the very similar story in Luke v. 1–11 (cf. "the net was not rent") with Luke v. 6 ("the nets were breaking"). All sorts of explanations have been given of the 153 fishes: evidently the number had a mystical significance which cannot now be exactly determined. This narrative agrees with Luke in representing Jesus as eating; again, we have to face the Pauline assertion that the Resurrection body is *not* "flesh and blood," and therefore, one would presume, not amenable to such material functions as eating. I pass over the dialogue with Peter, for it has no vital bearing on our theme. There is no Ascension story in John: it really seems as though he regarded Jesus

as having ascended between His appearance to Mary Magdalene (xx. 17) and His appearance to the disciples — see especially xx. 27.

I must frankly confess that I despair of constructing a convincing narrative of events out of all this heterogeneous and often inharmonious material. All the narratives seem to agree about the reality of the Empty Tomb. Paul, I think, implies it, and all the other accounts are most explicit on the point. If the Tomb was empty, what happened to the Body? We can dismiss at once the idea that the disciples stole it: that is obviously incredible. Nor is it likely that Jesus' enemies stole it, for, if they knew where it was, they had every motive for producing it. It is indeed possible that the disciples, having seen the visions, were sure that the tomb was empty and made no examination, but this is contrary to the explicit statements of all the Gospel narratives. The evidence for the Empty Tomb must therefore be pronounced strong: it would be accepted by everybody if it did not involve a stupendous miracle. The evidence is overwhelming that the disciples

experienced a series of visions which changed their whole outlook, made possible the creation of the Christian Church, and revolutionized the entire course of the world's history. I incline to think that these visions started in Galilee, perhaps with an appearance to Simon Peter, and that the disciples afterwards gathered in Jerusalem, where the appearances continued for some little time. Then they ceased, from which it was naturally concluded that the Risen Lord had finally "ascended" to His heavenly glory. These experiences were, so to speak, "rounded off" by the remarkable events of the Day of Pentecost. The disciples started on their evangelistic mission, utterly convinced that God had reversed the seeming verdict of the Cross, and that their Lord had triumphed over the powers of sin and death. That this conviction was fundamentally true, all history and all Christian experience bear witness. That this conviction originated in a series of visions there is no reason to doubt. I think it probable that the tradition was "materialized" in transmission, and I am quite ready to admit that legendary elements may have crept in. But it seems, in substance, as historical as anything can be. That

the disciples believed in the Empty Tomb is also fairly certain : that the Tomb was actually empty seems less difficult to believe than any rival explanation of the facts, especially if we believe, as I do, that Jesus was the supreme and final manifestation of God to men. At the same time, I am not prepared to say that belief in the resuscitation of the Body of Jesus is absolutely vital to Christian faith, though I think it was to the faith of the Jewish disciples long ago. What is vital is to believe and know, on whatever grounds, that He who died on the Cross lives now and for ever, mightier in the unseen life of the spirit world than ever He was in the days when He walked the Galilean hills and taught by the blue lake. With the Fourth Gospel I would reverently say : "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Our faith does not rest ultimately on any outward signs and wonders, but on the inward testimony of the Spirit to the Lordship and Saviourhood of the Divine Man.

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds
More strong than all poetic thought ;

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef."

VII

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE ATONEMENT

THE subject of discussion is not easy to define: I notice that Dr. Denney calls it "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation." It seems reasonable to follow the old-fashioned method and divide the subject under three heads, and discuss (*a*) the need for reconciliation, (*b*) the method and means of reconciliation, (*c*) the results of reconciliation. But our interest at present is chiefly in the second head, for it is the most difficult and controversial of the three. There is no doubt about the need for reconciliation, or about the blessings that follow on reconciliation; the problem becomes acute only when we try to discover exactly how it is that reconciliation is possible, and how it is that reconciliation is actually effected. Our discussion will therefore be restricted to this aspect of the subject: On what grounds and by what process are

sinners reconciled to God? Assuming that reconciliation is a *fact*, can we arrive at a *theory* of reconciliation?

For obvious and sufficient reasons I limit myself to Christian experience, for it is in Christian experience that the need for reconciliation is most acutely realized and the blessings of reconciliation most fully appropriated. But about the method and means of reconciliation Christians are often very perplexed, especially in view of the criticism to which traditional doctrines are commonly exposed. The Atonement is a phase of Christian truth which seems peculiarly vulnerable to modern assaults, and yet it is really not so much a phase of Christian truth as the very kernel and essence of it. Of course, in saying this, I draw a sharp distinction between the *truth* of the Atonement and certain *theories* of the Atonement. The truth of reconciliation remains: theories of reconciliation come and go. But we must not allow our objection to outworn and inadequate theories to blind us to the importance of the truth they represent. A preaching that ignores or belittles the doctrines of reconciliation is seriously defective and even dubiously Christian. It is

the message of reconciliation more than anything else that justifies us in speaking of Christianity as "the gospel" (the "good news"), and it is tremendously important that we should have a clear conception as well as a real experience of this reconciliation which it is ours to preach.

Some will say, "Why trouble about the *theory* of reconciliation? Why not rest content with the *fact*?" The answer is obvious. There is no such thing in actual experience as a fact isolated from all interpretation. We cannot think or speak of anything without in some way interpreting it. An uninterpreted fact is an unrelated and even an unmeaning fact, for facts derive their meaning from their being related to other facts in the unity of a rational system. Certainly we cannot preach without suggesting or implying some kind of theology, for even the most empirical or emotional type of appeal includes at least an element of thought. A spiritual experience that we refuse to think about can neither be properly appreciated nor effectually propagated. The man who says theology is superfluous is generally the man whose own theology is either bad or hazy. He is suffering not

from excessive spirituality, but from excessive laziness.

In these days a great many preachers are utterly perplexed and confused about the Atonement: the result is that they either avoid the subject altogether, or talk about it in a way that is quite unconvincing. The old forms of dogma have wilted and much of the newer thought seems more or less impracticable: a state of theological fog does not make for evangelical effectiveness. It is reasonable to say that we cannot expect to comprehend spiritual mysteries as we comprehend a Euclid proposition, but some rationale of reconciliation is none the less necessary, if belief in it is not to be branded as akin to superstition. Above all, irrational and unethical theories of the Atonement tend to obscure the Atonement itself and to prejudice people against it. For this reason alone, I should have felt justified in including the Atonement in the present syllabus of lectures.

The Incarnation and the Atonement, the Person and Work of Christ, are the twin foci of the Christian system of teaching. God is "in Christ," and in Christ "reconciling the world to Himself." In revealing God, Christ

accomplished only part of His mission: according to most evangelical theology, Christ actually wrought a change in the relations between man and God, making possible a forgiveness and reconciliation that could otherwise not have been effected.

It is further affirmed that this forgiveness and reconciliation is in some way connected with the death of Christ, which is construed as an atoning sacrifice whereby God was "propitiated" and sin put away. The common modern view that the death of Christ is simply the supreme manifestation of the love of God, and that its atoning value lies exclusively in its appeal to the better nature of man, is certainly not easy to reconcile with the language of the New Testament, especially of Paul, the author of "Hebrews," and John. It seems to me quite evident that these writers attached a meaning to the death of Christ that is not recognized in the common modern view to which I have referred. At the same time we must observe that the Church as a whole has never committed itself to any particular theory of the Atonement, and that very different opinions have been held from time to time, even by thinkers whose general position is

unquestionably orthodox. Christians have believed in the Atonement, as they have believed in the Inspiration of the Bible, but on neither subject has any dogmatic definition been recognized as universally binding. This is not inconsistent with recognizing that on both subjects certain views have been widely and even generally held.

The present situation is complicated by the fact that the modern mind is not at all prepared to admit that the Pauline and Johannine interpretations of Christ are necessarily final. It is urged that these were affected and even disturbed by the prevalence of ideas derived, not from any teaching of Jesus, or even from Christian experience, but from the thought world of Jewish Rabbinism and Greek philosophy. We are called upon to get back to Jesus, and to eliminate from our Christianity anything that conflicts with the simple Gospel as preached by Him. On the other hand, scholars like Dr. Denney and Principal Forsyth vehemently deny the adequacy of this point of view, and allege that the full significance of Christ could not be expounded or apprehended till His life, death, and resurrection came to be viewed as varying parts of one

stupendous whole, with the death as central. To them the apostolic interpretation is really the essence of the gospel: their interest in what Christ was on earth is transcended by their interest in what He did in the unseen realm by virtue of His death on the Cross. The atonement is represented as comprehending the motive and meaning of the Incarnation: Christ came, not so much that He might live, as that living He might die. His *doing* was in His *dying*: it was not the life He lived, but the death He died that reconciled God to man and man to God. Christ did not come to tell us that God forgives us. He came that He might make God's forgiveness possible. The Gospel is not really in anything that Christ *said to us*; it is rather in what He *did for us*. Christ is not merely the representative of God to man: He is the representative of man to God; He is not merely the incarnation of deity: He is the *recapitulatio* of humanity; if in the one capacity He manifests the infinite mercy, in the other He endures the infinite judgment. His death is the discharge of a debt which *had* to be discharged if law and righteousness were to be vindicated: it is at once a propitiation

of God and a ransom for guilt. Only by the Incarnation of the Son of God could such an Atonement be made possible. The whole race had become defiled and helpless—"sold under sin," to quote Paul's expressive phrase. No human endeavour could rescue a single soul from just and inevitable condemnation: no repentance and no good works could cleanse the stains of past guilt. But Christ, by taking on His sinless soul the burden of our sinfulness, not only removed the burden, but also provided for us an inexhaustible store of merit on which by faith we may draw. Clothed in our unrighteousness, we may bask in the favour of Heaven.

Such, I think, is a fair summary of the evangelical position as held by Dr. Denney and Principal Forsyth. Moreover, it is right to add that similar views in some form or other have been held by the great majority of Christian theologians in ancient, mediæval and modern times. Undoubtedly they permeate a good many of our hymns, *e.g.* "Rock of Ages," "Jesu, Lover of my soul." Above all, it is plausible to argue that such views seem fairly to represent the teachings and implications of the apostolic writers, especially

of Paul. But there is no doubt that they present vast difficulties to multitudes of thoughtful, earnest people at the present day. By some they are openly repudiated, not only as false to the spirit of the historic Jesus, but as in themselves incredible and unethical. By others they are not so much formally denied as quietly neglected. I wonder how many sermons have been preached by any of us on the lines indicated above. It is really no easy task to commend such a soteriology to a twentieth-century congregation, yet to avoid the subject altogether seems neither right nor dignified.

I am bound to say that, personally, I find great difficulty in agreeing with such views as those of Dr. Denney and Principal Forsyth. It does seem rather artificial to represent the essence of Christianity as expounded, not by Jesus, but by His later interpreters. The teaching of Jesus about forgiveness and reconciliation is both full and explicit. He calls us to repentance; He bids us take up the cross and follow Him; He assures us that no prodigal returning from the far country need doubt the Father's welcome; He depicts the Last Judgment as turning on simple issues of love

and service. No one would ever suspect from a study of the Synoptic Gospels that the Father needs any kind of propitiation, or that salvation depends on a complicated mechanism of "imputed sin" and "imputed righteousness." The case of Zacchæus, the case of the Sinful Woman, the case of the Penitent Thief, all seem to indicate that nothing is required of the sinner except faith in the Gospel as declared by Jesus.

Principal Forsyth seems to hold that there are examples of "proleptic" forgiveness, on which I shall say a word in a moment. It is hardly necessary to add that he and his school are very strong in denying that the Parable of the Prodigal Son is a *complete* account of the process of reconciliation. Apparently it needs to be supplemented by a study of Paul!

The only passages that seem to bear in the other direction are Mark x. 45 and xiv. 24, both of which probably reflect the language of Isa. liii. 11. In Matt. xxvi. 28, but not in Mark or Luke, the shedding of Christ's Blood is definitely connected with the remission of sins. The reference to the blood seems to refer back to the Passover, and the deliverance from bondage and death associated therewith,

and even more emphatically to the blood-shedding that inaugurated the covenant between Jehovah and Israel (Ex. xxiv. 3-8). Note that the blood symbolizes the outpouring of life, *i.e.* it stands for consecration and sacrifice. It seems a fair inference from these passages to say that our Lord believed and taught that by His death the cause of His Kingdom would be furthered. He may even have thought that by His death the Kingdom would be *precipitated* (cf. Latimer's words at the stake), that, in some mysterious way, it would effect "for many" deliverance from the servitude of sin and Satan into the liberty of the sons of God. But to extract from these isolated and highly metaphorical utterances any elaborate theory of the Atonement seems to me a highly precarious proceeding.

Another difficulty in the way of the Denney-Forsyth view is the unquestionable consciousness of forgiveness and reconciliation manifest in many of the psalmists and elsewhere in the Old Testament. By the noblest spirits of the Old Testament period the ritual of burnt-offering and sin-offering was recognized as inadequate, and even regarded with hostility. In any case, the ritual made no provision for

sins committed "with a high hand" (cf. Davidson, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 316). Nevertheless, sinners were forgiven and reconciled, apart from all legal observance: in their penitence they found that God was gracious; they were restored by the mercy of God to the joy and peace of the Divine fellowship.

Obviously this creates a problem. Are we to suppose that in the Old Testament atonement was conditioned simply by the grace of God and the penitence of the sinner, whereas since the time of Christ new conditions have been added? Or are we to assent to the extraordinary theory of Principal Forsyth, and say that the Old Testament penitents were *proleptically* forgiven, the benefits of Christ's Atonement being, so to speak, applied to them in advance? Neither supposition seems very attractive, and the latter strikes me as highly artificial. Undoubtedly the experience of reconciliation became immensely enriched and enlarged through the Gospel of Christ, but I believe it would be quite unwarrantable to say that there is *no* experience of reconciliation apart from this. Certainly it would be sheer fanaticism to contend that the experi-

ence depends in any way on people accepting the theory so ably maintained by Dr. Denney and Principal Forsyth. For myself, I cannot agree to regard non-Christian testimonies on this subject as illusory, or indeed to limit in any way the sovereign grace of our Father God. I cannot think that such a limitation is in accordance with the Spirit of Jesus.

But I must face the objection that, apart from the Death of Christ, forgiveness on the ground of penitence and faith alone would compromise the character of God as the upholder of that moral law which derives its authority from His unchangeable holiness and inflexible righteousness. It is said that God must manifest His judgment on sin, even in forgiving the sinner; that even in showing mercy He must remember wrath. Moreover, it is urged that sin is not just a private matter between the sinner and God, but that God has a public function to sustain and a public law to vindicate. The governmental theory of the Atonement represents God as exercising a magisterial function, and that His forgiveness must be regarded as conditioned by that (Grotius, Dale). I quite agree that any sentimentalism which represents God as in any way

lax, or which tends to construe love in terms of mere fondness, must stand condemned. Yet, is it true that to forgive a sincerely penitent person can possibly compromise the principle of righteousness? I say that it would compromise the moral law if such a person were *not* forgiven. From the standpoint of Holy Love he *ought* to be forgiven. God owes it to His own nature to forgive the truly penitent. In our human relations we say that forgiveness in such circumstances is not only permissible, but a positive and primary duty, while Jesus repeatedly assures us that if we forgive in this manner and under these conditions, God in like manner and under like conditions will forgive us. If I believed the Denney-Forsyth theory I am bound to say that I should consider the teaching of Jesus in this connection as very ambiguous, if not actually misleading. It seems to me that nothing can more completely vindicate the moral law than to see a penitent sinner confess his sin, receive pardon and restoration, and start again in a new and better way. The magistrate, in dealing with criminals, is unable to discover whether or not they are genuinely penitent, and in any case his primary duty is to society

rather than to the individual criminal. He aims at repressing crime rather than at changing the heart of the criminal, at deterring others rather than at regenerating the one. So far from agreeing that God's methods of dealing with sin may be compared to our methods of dealing with crime, I rather pray that our method should be, as far as possible, levelled up to God's method. If we thought of criminals more as erring brothers and less as mere pests, I believe crime would be diminished rather than increased. At any rate, the humanization of the criminal law has thus far resulted in the direction I have indicated. Surely to convert a sinner is a better way of vindicating the moral law than to torture him.

Many writers have said that Christ's death was a ransom to the devil, and some have stated this idea in a most grotesque and repulsive way. It was maintained that God had promised the devil that, if he could persuade or beguile men into disobedience, he should be allowed to do what he liked with their souls and bodies. The results of this seemingly uncalled-for contract were so disastrous that

God resolved to save as many as possible from so horrid a fate. So He sent His Son, who, being miraculously born and Himself sinless, was not liable to death, either on Adam's account or on His own. Satan agreed to accept the spotless soul of Jesus in exchange for the countless souls legally his. But though Satan brought Jesus to death he could not retain his hold on Him, as the Resurrection proved. The arch-deceiver was himself deceived—a fine piece of poetic justice. Some rather famous "Fathers" say quite unblushingly that in this transaction Satan was swindled by God! This notion is now generally abandoned.

Then we have the notion of Anselm about sin as an infinite offence to God's honour which could not be forgiven till an infinite atonement had been rendered by way of "satisfaction." The Atonement is a kind of transaction between the Persons of the Blessed Trinity of which man gets the benefit, if only he exercises faith.

Augustine and Calvin add that only the elect *can* exercise faith, while the rest are left to perish. God might, in view of Adam's sin, have sentenced the entire human race to

everlasting torments, but mercifully agreed to save some, provided He were "satisfied" in the manner indicated. By a curious inconsistency these theologians contended that man was born with a corrupt nature and was *bound* to sin, and at the same time that he was *guilty* both on account of Adam's sin and on account of his own. No end of forensic and commercial theories have been held, which I have no time to describe. The main idea of these theories is that God in His mercy provided for the satisfaction of His justice. In some theories God's "law" is practically hypostatized, and the satisfaction is paid to *it*. When "law" was satisfied, love could have free course. This idea makes the atonement rest on a species of legal diction!

One obvious remark is that such theories create a dichotomy in the life of the Godhead which is decidedly objectionable: they help us to see the point of view of the child who said, "I love Jesus, but I hate God." Some theologians have represented Christ as being punished in our stead, and even as enduring the pains of hell on our behalf: God treated Him, though innocent, as guilty, and wreaked on Him the wrath that ought, strictly speak-

ing, to have fallen on us. As an old hymn puts it :

> "He knew how wicked man had been,
> He knew that God must punish sin,
> So out of pity Jesus said
> He'd bear the punishment instead."

I have no hesitation in describing this kind of doctrine as psychologically impossible and ethically nothing less than abominable. If God acts like this, I rejoice to scorn Him : there is not a man I know who would treat his child so. One is reminded of the Highland minister who said that God was not to be judged as a private individual, but that in such connections he was acting in His "offeshal" capacity !

Better be a pagan than believe so horrible a perversion of the truth as it is in Jesus ! The whole idea of an artificial transfer of guilt and punishment on the one hand, and of "imputed" righteousness on the other, is not for a moment tenable, and no amount of talking will persuade modern people that it is. In ancient and mediæval times it was quite common to confound the innocent with the guilty : indeed we have examples in the Old Testament. But most of us have got beyond this stage.

It is really amazing that Christianity has survived some of these revolting theologies.

The truth is that we must learn to distinguish between vicarious punishment and vicarious suffering—to recognize that vicarious *punishment* is rigorously impossible and, if it were possible, would be utterly immoral, and at the same time to insist that vicarious *suffering* is the fundamental principle in all redemption and reconciliation. To say that Christ was punished in our stead is absurd and false: to say that He suffered in our stead is reasonable and true. He could not and did not suffer *as* the guilty, but He could and did suffer *for* the guilty. God the Father is not an implacable judge demanding so much suffering for so much sin, and indifferent as to *who* suffers, provided the requisite quantity of suffering is endured, nor is He a vengeful deity needing to be propitiated, and only to be propitiated, by blood. These are barbaric ideas. But when we realize God as the Perfect Ideal of Holy Love we see that He has paid and pays continually the price of sin in His own anguish and suffering, yea, in the sacrifice of His own divine life which is ever outpoured in travail and yearning. He and He alone can

make the perfect atonement, for He and He alone can realize the true meaning and horror of sin. The reconciliation of the Prodigal was made possible by the love that never ceased to reign in the heart of the Father, and by the anguish that continued from the moment the Prodigal departed till the moment when he returned home. We shall never understand reconciliation till we abandon the legend of an "impassible" God—a God incapable of suffering. The Atonement is *objective*, inasmuch as it is made possible, not simply by our penitence, but by God's own travail. It is *God* that, in the last resort, "pays the price" of sin. In the Cross we have not just a few hours of agony, but the focus of an Eternal Atonement, the revealing of the tragedy of the Heart of God. And when we see the Cross thus, it breaks *our* heart too, and leads us to cast off the works of darkness and put on the new man in Christ Jesus. The revelation of suffering and atoning love creates in our souls an answering love: we make the only answer we can when we surrender ourselves to the call which bids us take our humble part in the work of God's Atonement. Being ourselves reconciled to God by faith in His Cross, we show

the reality of our sonship by sharing in the Father's life and by reflecting the passion of the Father's heart. And when all is said, the mystery of a suffering and atoning God abides —the blazing glory at the centre of our Christian faith.

VIII

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE FUTURE LIFE

IF we preachers are often perplexed and confused in our thought about the Atonement we are scarcely less so in our thought about the Future Life. The doctrine of our fathers was quite simple. They conceived of all men as immortal, and of their fate in the future as being finally and for ever determined by their attitude at death. The soul after death was transported to realms of everlasting bliss or consigned to regions of everlasting woe. Beyond this life neither change nor progress was possible: in the Eternal World everything was stereotyped. In the Roman Catholic Church this was modified by the doctrine of Purgatory (see p. 170). Most Christian teaching more or less implied the idea of heaven and hell as distinct localities —the one above the sky in the sphere of light and beauty, the other a gloomy under-world

where perpetual darkness was only broken by the baleful gleam of tormenting fire. It was generally believed that only Christians had any chance of salvation: the untold millions of heathen were excluded, apparently through no fault of their own, from any share in the joys of the redeemed. The Roman Catholic type of thought regarded salvation as primarily dependent on participation in the sacraments, whereas Protestants made it depend on the exercise of faith in the atoning merits of the Saviour. In both sections of the Church it was often taught that the number of the elect was divinely predetermined. But in any case salvation was limited to a comparatively insignificant minority of the human race. The rest constituted a vast *massa perditionis*, to quote Augustine's phrase.

It is probably fair to say that this conventional Christian teaching is a rather incongruous combination of ideas derived (*a*) from Jewish and Jewish Christian apocalyptic, (*b*) from Platonic philosophy as assimilated by the Gentile thought of the first four centuries. Apocalyptic provided the notions of an intermediate state, of a bodily resurrection, of a spectacular "Grand Assize," of a

localized heaven and hell. Greek philosophy provided the notion of the inherent immortality of the soul, for which doctrine only very slight authority can be discovered in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The greatest perplexity was created by the question as to what would happen to the soul in the period between death and the final resurrection. Sometimes the situation was further complicated by a form of apocalyptic belief which affirmed two resurrections — a preliminary resurrection of specially favoured persons (martyrs and confessors) at the Parousia, and a final resurrection of all and sundry at the Last Day. It was often taught or implied that during the intervening period the soul was in a state of suspended animation — asleep, so to speak, and that it resumed its full and conscious life only when reunited to the body. On the other hand, it was often supposed that during this period the soul enjoyed or suffered, in its disembodied state, a mild foretaste of the bliss or misery that would become finally consummated at the resurrection and the judgment. The bodily resurrection was conceived by many in the most gross and materialistic way, and con-

cerning the difficulties of this belief all kinds of ingenious speculations were multiplied. But the most intelligent thinkers tended to follow Paul in conceiving of the resurrection body as transmuted, a kind of etherealized reproduction of the body that now is. It was, however, generally agreed that in some way or other the bodies of deceased persons would be resurrected: one idea was that on the day of the Parousia, Christians, their souls clothed anew in these resurrection bodies, would rise to meet their Lord in the air.

The above is, I think, a fair account of traditional views on this subject. It ought perhaps to be added that Roman Catholic thought was less stringent than Protestant about the stereotyping of the life after death. The doctrine of Purgatory added a terror to the life of believers from which Protestants were exempt, and of course it became in some cases degraded and commercialized, but it did at least recognize the possibility of progress and perfection in the Beyond, and avoided the notion of believers being miraculously made perfect in the instant of their translation. Roman Catholicism, moreover,

emphasized the reality of communion between people here and spirits in the unseen world, which communion was scarcely more than formal in Protestant conceptions. The Protestant idea was that it was right and proper to ask the prayerful intercession of any one in this world, but wrong and wicked to make similar requests of saints departed, that it was right to pray for our friends this side the veil, but wrong to pray for them if they had been translated to the other. Here, again, Protestantism was doubtless justified in calling attention to the abuse of these practices in Roman Catholicism, but I am bound to say that on the general issue I think the Catholic idea accords better with human nature and common sense. Personally, I hope I am benefiting by the prayers of my friends in the Unseen: I cannot think they have ceased to love me, or to be interested in my welfare, and I even trust that their prayers are inspired by greater insight into my real needs than was possible when they were in the flesh. On the other hand, I love them still and cannot help praying that God may be with them for good. The idea that all spirits may thus be linked in holy bonds of comradeship and

prayer seems to me reasonable, beautiful, and helpful, and I am sure it is shared by many who repudiate as much as I do the superstitions and abuses of popular Romanism.

This excursus has rather distracted me from the main point I want to make. It must be obvious to any one who has the slightest contact with modern ways of thought that the whole scheme of Christian eschatology needs drastic revision. Educated people simply will not believe in dogmas that presuppose the three-compartment universe of Jewish imagination, the stereotyping of conditions in the after-world, and the disgusting apparatus of eternal torments. It is vain to quote texts on the subject, for even laymen are beginning to know that competent scholars and theologians no longer regard these texts literally or believe in the dogma of "verbal inspiration." There is painful truth in the French witticism that "the Churches have preached a hell too horrible to be believed in, and a heaven too dull to be desired."

On the other hand, it is really very necessary that we should have a reasonable eschatology. If people lose all living belief in a life beyond

the grave, I am sure the result will be prejudicial both to morality and religion. There is no reason why interest in the other world should make us less worthy citizens of this one—quite the contrary. It is, indeed, not surprising that the ascendancy of a materialism which denies the possibility of post-mortem existence should synchronize with a growth of pessimism and cynicism, and a wild craze for material gain, sensual excitement, and miscalled "pleasure." "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die" is a logic not easy to refute, once its premisses are admitted. It is deeply important that we should realize that our actions here have more than a temporal significance, that our life is not just a transient bubble on the stream of existence. A thousand arguments attest the probability and suggest the certainty of life beyond. While the old forms of eschatological thought have ceased to be credible, their disappearance must not be allowed to prejudice the great truth they imperfectly clothed and often actually distorted. We have been suffering from an excessive reaction against what is called "other-worldliness": admitting that our fathers dogmatized about the other world

to an exaggerated extent, and professed a knowledge of its conditions altogether beyond the bounds of sobriety and reverence, we need not fly to the opposite extreme, and lose one of the strongest appeals associated with religious faith. Perhaps in a reconstruction of eschatology and a new emphasis thereon we shall find "our lost dynamic"; certain it is that such reconstruction is long overdue and that no evangel can have much power from which the eschatological element is excluded. The decline of the old eschatology has left a vacuum into which have rushed all kinds of superstitions, and it is our duty as well as our interest to secure that the vacuum should be filled with something better—something at once more rational and more Christian. Without denying the possibility of fresh light coming from genuine "psychic research," we must set to work to raise the whole subject to a loftier and less dubious plane.

The first thing we need to do is to realize the strength of the arguments that imply the probability of "post-mortem" existence, of human survival of bodily death. Some people seem inclined to disparage these arguments, but I hold with Butler that "probability is

the guide of life," and that a sufficiently high degree of probability is really synonymous with practical certainty. These arguments are stronger to-day than ever they were, on account of the utter failure of the materialists to bring life and mind within the scope of mechanical categories. Scientifically there is no *à priori* reason for doubting that personality may function under other conditions than those of bodily existence. You may find in Barrie's books on *Personality* and *Immortality* a powerful statement of the case, and a more modern statement in Lodge's *Life and Matter*. The facts of memory, the consciousness of persistent identity, the sense of freedom and responsibility, the capacity of the human ego for responding to ideal ends and transcendent conceptions of good, are all testimonies to the reality of a spiritual life that the world of matter can neither explain nor fulfil. If we believe in the conservation of matter and energy, it seems absurd not to believe in the conservation of elements vastly more significant. Moreover, it is difficult to understand the widespread and almost universal belief in human survival, if it has no correspondence with anything in reality. Such belief may

fairly be described as instinctive, though of course it may be talked down, laughed down, and lived down. But the fact remains true of man generally, "he thinks he was not made to die." The desire to obtain a fullness of life and a perfection of character beyond what is possible on earth cannot be dismissed as a dream of human egoism. We not only revolt against death ourselves: we revolt against it even more when it befalls the best and noblest of our friends—it seems outrageous that they should die, if death be indeed extinction. Our revolt is not so much against death as against incompleteness of life, against the seeming waste of possibility, the seeming failure of achievement. If there be no life beyond, if all these aspirations of ours are illusory and all these hopes misleading, it is indeed difficult to believe in a God of Love or even in a God of Justice. The whole scheme of things becomes irrational. To every other instinct there is an answer, and it is hard to imagine that here we have an exception to the general law of correspondence. God has set these yearnings in our hearts, and He owes it to Himself as well as to us that they should not fail of fruition. Science does not forbid

the possibility of survival; psychology suggests its probability; faith implies its certainty.

But I need hardly argue this aspect of the matter further, for *we* at least are already convinced. Our difficulties are not primarily in connection with the possibility of survival, but with the conditions of survival and with what we may think and teach concerning the life beyond. Obviously survival depends on the reality and persistence of spiritual life, with its associated characteristics of freedom and aspiration. If in any case this spiritual life may become extinct through our persistence in debased and debasing ways of existence—if we get to such a state that we find all our satisfactions in the realm of time and sense, I confess that the case for survival is greatly weakened. It is possible to commit physical suicide: is it possible to commit spiritual suicide? In other words, is survival inherent or is it a potentiality that has to be sustained and consummated by the exercise of appropriate functions? I confess that I incline to answer these questions on conditionalist lines, though without undue dogmatism. The solemn language of Scripture,

especially Jesus' words about "the eternal sin," combine with sad experience of human baseness and bestiality to suggest that men may forfeit or fail to obtain the "life eternal" which is "life indeed." Flagrant and persistent wickedness undoubtedly results in a paralysis of the nobler faculties, especially of the conscience and the will: it is difficult to deny that it may result in their total extinction, and with this in the total extinction of all that personality really signifies. In a very terrible and far-reaching sense "the wages of sin is death."

The issues of ethical and spiritual life gain a solemn significance when looked at from such a standpoint as this, a significance commensurate with the importance attached to them in the New Testament. So long as freedom is real, it looks as if that freedom might be abused, and so abused that at last no freedom might be left, no capacity for higher things. Just as in the higher stages of evolution the earlier and lower types must either develop or become extinct, so may it happen in the evolution of spiritual conditions. The chief objection to this is that it admits the possibility of God being for ever frustrated of what we may

conceive to be His ideal purpose, *i.e.* the re-demption of all men to Himself.

It has been plausibly argued that if a single child is finally lost to the Father's love, God has been defeated in His own universe, and to that extent the Cross of Christ is made of none effect. The faith that in His own time and in His own way God will secure the salvation of all has been held by many of the noblest Christian thinkers, from Origen onwards. We remember Tennyson's expression of his faith that :

> "Nothing walks with aimless feet
> And not one life shall be destroyed,
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
> Till God hath made the pile complete."

From this point of view it is almost as difficult to think of "Annihilation" or "Extinction" as it is to acquiesce in the fearful dogma of everlasting torment. But the whole subject is really involved with what is perhaps the most difficult problem of all, *i.e.* the relation of Divine sovereignty to human freedom, a problem of which the complete solution is probably inaccessible to finite minds. One thing, however, is certain, that all sin involves loss and suffering—loss and suffering that

becomes indefinitely intensified as sin persists and multiplies, loss and suffering that must necessarily extend beyond the bounds of this terrestrial existence, loss and suffering that in a very real sense may be called "eternal." As preachers we must be faithful here, even though we hesitate to dogmatize concerning the ultimate issues of spiritual destiny. For my part, I am sure that every human soul will have fair dealing and full opportunity of redemption, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ can be trusted to employ all the resources of infinite Love in His sublime endeavour "to seek and to save the lost"; but I am sure also that sin is very terrible, and that we need to lay more stress than we have done on the sterner aspects of the Christian teaching. A sloppy sentimentalism is false to the spirit of Jesus, false to the facts of experience, and incidentally destructive of pulpit effectiveness.

This leads me to say that I cannot discover, either in Scripture or in common sense, any ground for believing that death involves a stereotyping of spiritual conditions, or for regarding as credible the theory that at death

a few people are miraculously perfected all at once, while the rest are with equal promptitude annexed entire by the powers of darkness. The stereotyping theory indeed makes heaven scarcely more attractive than hell: a condition of stagnant perfection strikes the average healthy mind as distinctly depressing. We want "the wages of going on," the possibility of new discoveries and of unending progress. To suppose that the fundamental principles of life in the next world are entirely the opposite of those which hold good in this is to make intelligent thought impossible. These considerations must be borne in mind also as bearing on the problem of what is to happen to that vast multitude of souls which may be bluntly described as too good for hell and not good enough for heaven. The Parable of the Last Judgment was never meant to indicate that souls could really be divided simply into "sheep" and goats"; without irreverence, we may ask what is to befall the "alpacas"? If we recognize, as I think we must, that the next life is, psychologically, a continuation of this one—the same identity persisting under different conditions, we simply cannot think of either a miraculous transformation or a

perpetual stereotyping as occurring at the moment of transition. I believe we start the new life at the point where we end this, and surely in this idea we have a tremendous incentive to moral and spiritual endeavour, and we realize a new and solemn responsibility for the issues of the life that now is. Achievements persist: handicaps persist, not indeed the accidental handicaps of circumstance, but the handicaps we make for ourselves every time we reject the call of the highest and best. Doubtless there are new tasks and new disciplines awaiting us in the Beyond: new visions and new powers. So let us not abandon the faith and hope which are ours in the Gospel: facing this life with joy and courage, we will "greet the Unseen with a cheer."

IX

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE CHURCH

ALL institutions are exposed to criticism in these days of insurgency and unrest. People are challenging the authority of the State: they are challenging the sanctity of the Family. But of all institutions the Church is the most bitterly and unceasingly criticized. Few are so poor as to do her reverence. Novels and dramas, newspapers and magazines, are for ever girding at the Church and her ministers. Antagonism to the Church is regarded in many quarters as a normal expression of the characteristically "modern" spirit. It is only right to add that some of the fiercest criticism of the Church comes from ministers and others who are supposed to be identified with it: one can hardly be surprised if the general public is indisposed to be enthusiastic about an institution that its own representatives disparage so often and so freely. It is high time that

something was said on the other side, even at the risk of appearing antediluvian. Therefore, if I may borrow the language of the Apostle, "I speak concerning Christ and the Church." I want to show that no believer in Christ can afford to neglect or despise the Church; that, on the contrary, it is at once our duty and our privilege to exalt and revere, to love and serve, the Church which the New Testament describes as His "Body" and His "Bride."

You will observe that I am not intending to argue this matter with those who frankly disbelieve in Christ and Christianity. Such people have naturally "no use" for the Church. The Church stands for the fellowship of those who know and love Christ, who seek His Kingdom and stand for His ideals. If one has no faith in Christianity, one will have no enthusiasm for Christian fellowship—the fellowship of which the Church is the normal expression and embodiment. The Church has always had to contend with adversaries of this kind. But the remarkable feature of the *modern* situation is the depreciation, and often the renunciation, of the Church by folks who claim to be Christians and even "super-

Christians." In these days the counterpart of the ancient Pharisee commonly stays outside the sanctuary, thanking God that he is not like the humbugs and hypocrites who belong to it! *For the first time in history people are claiming to be Christians and refusing to be Churchmen!* It is indeed true that in almost every age the Church has had to face the criticism of those who have felt acutely the contrast between the New Testament ideal of the Church and the depressing actualities of contemporary ecclesiasticism: such criticism has often been both necessary and deserved. Every new birth of the Spirit has issued in such a criticism: judgment rightly begins at the house of God! The Church must be purified before the world can be evangelized: inward cleansing must precede external conquest. But these modern critics are not aiming at a reformation of the Church from within, like the founders of the monastic orders and the enthusiasts of the Counter-Reformation. Nor do they aim at creating a new Church on a reformed basis, like the Protestant and Puritan leaders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who were one and all not only Churchmen but High Churchmen. What they

are saying to-day is that we may hold the Christian faith and live the Christian life without any need for the Church at all! Christ and the Church are no longer associated: the modern mind tends to put asunder realities which the New Testament joins together. It is not merely the alleged abuses and corruptions of the Church that are criticized: it is the very idea of the Church which is ignored or disparaged by many of those who are undertaking to reconstruct or restate our Christianity: again and again we are assured that between Christianity and "Churchianity" there is a great gulf fixed. We are thus brought face to face with a very urgent and practical question—Can we have a vital and vitalizing Christianity without any kind of organized Christian fellowship? I hope to show that to this question a negative answer is the only one possible, that a view of religion which ignores or disparages the Church is really at variance with the testimony of human nature, with the verdict of history, and with the facts of actual present-day experience.

Let us begin with human nature, especially as nearly everybody nowadays talks at large about psychology! Now, if one thing is more

certain than another about human nature, it is that it everywhere testifies to man as a social being. For him fellowship is life and isolation is death. Man was not made to dwell alone: the helplessness of his protracted infancy is but one proof of this. From the beginning man has been a gregarious creature —" a political animal," to borrow a phrase from Aristotle. The capacity of man for social fellowship and co-operation is the most obvious explanation of his survival, as writers like Benjamin Kidd and Prince Kropotkin have abundantly demonstrated. All progress in every department of life may be traced to this factor: the history of civilization is the history of the progressive development of the social instinct—an instinct which may indeed be rationalized, but which is in origin super-rational or at least ante-rational. There can be no civilization and no culture without the security and the impetus afforded by the existence of organized society. Where the social instinct is most highly developed and society most thoroughly organized, there civilization and culture reach their zenith. Without such conditions commerce and industry, art and literature, would be impossible. It

would, therefore, be an extraordinary anomaly if the religious life could be fostered and brought to fullness of fruition in circumstances of spiritual isolation. Why should it be thought that our nature on the religious side is differently constituted from what it is on every other side? It would seem that, from the psychological point of view, what I call "private Christianity" is really a paradox: at any rate, it is fair to say that a study of human nature creates a strong presumption in favour of the Church or of some institution equivalent thereto as a necessity of spiritual life and progress.

This presumption is confirmed by the testimony of history. All the religions we have ever heard of—at any rate, all the religions that have had any public significance or historic influence—have been more or less organized. Faith expresses itself in fellowship: in fellowship it is fostered and sustained. Of all social bonds that of a common faith is the most potent and enduring. Historically, religion has been the cement of society: it has counted for more than kinship or patriotism or class-consciousness. But I will not stay to illustrate my argument by reference to the

data supplied by pre-Christian or non-Christian religions : our concern here is with Christianity. Now there can be no doubt at all that from the beginning Christians associated themselves for purposes of worship, work, and witness : they formed congregations or Churches. The New Testament has no recognition of " unattached Christians " : St. Paul seems incapable of conceiving of a Christian without any Church association, from which we may infer that such a phenomenon had never entered his experience ! The Church existed and throve mightily before the New Testament existed : the New Testament is indeed the child of the Church, the product of more than a century of glorious travail. It is because the New Testament reflects the faith and experience of what Royce calls " the Beloved Community " that it has meant so much to Christians. The Gospels and Epistles are not merely the testimonies of certain individual Christians—eminent or obscure, known or anonymous : their value lies in their embodiment of a communal tradition and assurance. This reminds us also that no successful apologetic for Christianity can be founded merely on the private experience of the individual Christian :

such an experience may easily be impeached as simply a product of hallucination or fanaticism. But, as part of a larger experience, it can claim a sure place : in the experience of the Church the experience of the individual is at once validated and enriched. Let me also remind you that there is great danger lest in emphasizing the corruptions and failures of the Church we should lose sight of the debt we owe the Church, forgetting " the rock whence we were hewn and the pit whence we were digged." Apart from the missionary activities of the Church, Christianity itself would have been still-born : without the Church, even the Cross and the Resurrection would have been of none effect. Apart from the jealously guarded tradition of the Church, we should know nothing at all of Christ and His teaching. The Church is the mother of democracy, the mother of philanthropy, the mother of us all. Deplorably imperfect, she has been the most wonderfully used—the earthen vessel holding the treasure of life eternal. Let us realize once for all that, in separating Christ from the Church, we are making a totally new experiment, and an experiment that involves a complete breach

with all the traditions of historic Christianity: we are implying that the Apostles and all the Christians who have followed them were mistaken in thinking of the Church as "a pillar and ground of the truth." I say that such a conclusion throws a very heavy burden of proof on the advocates of "private Christianity": it is difficult to think that a Christianity which has no relation to the past is likely to count for much in shaping the future.

It may indeed be said that, while the Church may have had a part to play in the past, the modern man has outgrown the need of such an institution: he can throw away the crutch on which his weaker predecessors leaned. But here, again, I cannot believe that the facts of actual experience lend any support to such a notion. I deny altogether the oft-declared assertion that there is a vast and throbbing Christianity outside the Churches. That a certain diffused Christianity exists I fully recognize: I thank God that the Christian tradition and ideal have permeated lives that seem to have lost all touch with institutional religion. But, after all, this tradition has been created by the Church, and this ideal is

but the secular reflection of the Church's witness. People detached from the Church are mostly living on their inherited spiritual capital: it is scarcely wonderful that it gets less every year and very much less with each succeeding generation. We are only beginning to imagine what the world may be like when a generation arises which knows Christianity only as a vague idealism that has descended from its great-grandfathers! Every day everything indicates that effective Christian work and witness depends almost entirely on the remnant who remain faithful to the fellowship. Who else is to instruct the children, to provide for the public proclamation of the Gospel, to send the news of salvation to nations that know not Christ? This despised and depleted Church is still doing a greater work than any other society: in our own time we have seen more than one statesman turning in despair to the Church, knowing full well that the Church is the one agency which can do the work that the world above all needs.

We may indeed acknowledge that there are elements of truth in the exaggerated criticisms of the Church that we so often hear: we may go further and acknowledge that in a very real

sense the Church has failed. But, for the matter of that, the British Empire has failed; education has failed; civilization itself has failed. We do not renounce our patriotism because once the Union Jack floated over slaves, and because now it floats over slums; we do not cease to believe in education because many of the products of modern schooling make indifferent office-boys; even a study of the Sunday newspapers does not lead us to desire a reversion to the simplicities of the Australian aborigine. The Church has certainly failed in the sense that multitudes inside and outside her bounds have neither heeded her gospel nor followed her Christ. Yet you cannot blame the doctor and denounce his science if you repudiate his instructions and pour his medicine down the sink. I agree that the Church contains many unworthy members and ministers: the tribe of Isariot and Ananias is not extinct. More serious is the fact that hardly any of us really live up to our professions. Yet we need to remind our critics that the Church is a school of disciples (learners), not a museum of perfected saints, a training-ground rather than a gallery of finished "masters." To complain

that the Church is a failure because so many of its members are palpably imperfect is like complaining of a famous school because the children often get their sums wrong, or complaining of a great university because only a small proportion of its students attain to an honours degree. People apply to the Church methods of judgment which in any other connection would be scouted as ridiculous.

Much criticism of the Church seems indeed to be merely captious: at any rate, the critics may safely be left to answer one another. Some people complain that we are getting too ritualistic and that our forms of worship fail to reflect the austere simplicity of primitive and Puritan models; others assert that we fail to make adequate appeal to those artistic and æsthetic instincts which God has implanted in our nature, that our worship is bare to the point of ugliness. Some say that our preaching is antediluvian, that we are deplorably out of touch with modern thought and knowledge; others contend that modernist preaching has cut the nerve of the evangel. Some reproach us that we take too little interest in social and political problems; others tell us that we take far too much in-

terest in these things. Some affirm that we receive visitors with coldness; others have been known to grumble because they are "slobbered over." Some accuse us of dullness, while others accuse us of sensationalism. Much of this criticism is trivial; much of it is of limited and local application. But my main complaint about the critics is that, for the most part, they are content to "nag": they have no idea of helping in any practical or constructive way. We need, indeed, to examine ourselves, and to examine the Church and its methods, to realize our manifold shortcomings and to endeavour earnestly after better work for God and the people. But, above all, let us be workers rather than grumblers, crusaders rather than critics. Let us be proud of our part in the Holy Catholic Church, wide as the world of human sin and need in its scope and mission, large as the love of God in the outgoings of its service and grace. Without Christian fellowship, Christian faith must falter and fail, and of that fellowship the Church is the symbol and the seal. The battle of the Lord will never be won by skirmishers that have lost all touch with the army and the lines of communication—they are more likely

to become prisoners of the enemy: the issues of the campaign depend on the loyalty and cohesion of the soldiers of the regular army. The world may call that army "contemptible," but we may console ourselves with the reflection that "it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment."

X

MODERN DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE MINISTRY

WE are all more or less aware that the Christian Ministry in these days does not occupy that position in the public estimation which it occupied a generation ago. Recent years have witnessed a marked decline in the prestige and influence of the clergy. I believe this decline is fairly general: certainly it is apparent in English-speaking communities. Writing as a minister for ministers, I am convinced that the Ministry no longer exercises the social, intellectual and spiritual prestige and influence which it exercised fifty years ago. This may be partly due to the rise of popular education: it may be partly due to the working of a materialism hostile to all spiritual interests: it may be partly due to the anticlerical propaganda of the Socialists. I cannot believe that it is due to any falling off in the Ministry itself: I believe, on the contrary, that for character, zeal and ability the

Ministry to-day will compare favourably with the Ministry of any previous generation. But I do think we ought to make a study of modern difficulties about the Christian Ministry with a view to discovering what the people think of us, and why they think of us as they do. To diagnose the situation is the first step towards dealing with it.

The Rev. A. H. Gray, in his remarkably frank and arresting book, *As I remember Us*, has a good deal to say on this point. He tells us that, while individual ministers may be liked and respected, the fact is broadly true that *as a class* ministers are not admired. Among a limited circle of people our vocation may be esteemed and revered, but it seems that *as a class* we are disliked and even despised —indeed we are distinctly unpopular. Our unpopularity is especially marked among young men—the very people that presumably we most want to reach. Of course there are exceptional ministers and exceptional young men, but I think that as a generalization this statement is incontestable. We must not allow the kindly and possibly excessive appreciation of our own small coterie to blind us to the suspicion and dislike with which we are

regarded by the average person outside. It is possibly true that this hostile attitude is very absurd and unjust—it may be prompted by unworthy motives: I merely call attention to its existence. Ministers, like other people, need to echo Burns's prayer:

"O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!"

It is indeed very significant that, with few exceptions, modern novelists and dramatists are palpably critical of the parson, whatever denomination he is supposed to represent. In works of fiction and on the stage he is commonly depicted as lacking in the virtues that constitute true manliness: often he is made to pose as a hypocrite, and still oftener as a fool. It is only occasionally that we come across a parson-hero: in such cases he is generally a vigorous and successful exponent of what is called "muscular Christianity." Presumably novelists and dramatists more or less reproduce the popular estimate; even allowing for exaggeration and caricature. Inquiry among candid lay friends has rather confirmed this conclusion. It seems to be widely imagined that clergy and ministers live in a little world of their own, remote from

the trials and temptations, problems and perplexities, of the real world. We are credited with a childish ignorance of human nature and a peculiar inaptitude for any situation involving business acumen and even ordinary common sense. If a Christian minister takes a keen interest in the sports and pleasures that interest most people it is thought to be exceptional: the general idea is that we are "kill-joys." The parson of popular imagination is a miserable anæmic creature who can hardly be called a man except in a limited and merely physiological sense. We are supposed to be chiefly concerned with petty observances, trivial engagements and sectarian squabbles, without any breadth of outlook or largeness of vision. Our modes of life and speech are frequent subjects of mimicry: we are thought to dress in a peculiar way, to talk in a peculiar way, and to act in a peculiar way. I fear that our sincerity is often doubted: we are looked upon as paid advocates, paid propagandists, to whom religion is a kind of business or profession. We are said to live in a world of unreality all the week and to occupy a "coward's castle" on Sundays. The idea is common that we only need to work one

day a week, and that even then the work is not of a very strenuous character. The result of all this is that the average layman is inclined to avoid clerical society and to be constrained and unnatural in the presence of a parson. The sight of a round collar will often create a remarkable vacuity in the immediate neighbourhood—*e.g.* in a railway carriage. Men avoid the parson's compartment just as they avoid the ladies' compartment, only in the one case from choice and in the other from necessity. Fond females are said to embroider our slippers, but a good many men would prefer to give us the boot. Generally our calling seems rather a hindrance to friendliness than a help to it: we have to overcome a certain initial prejudice before we can get close to the average man. I suspect that this is why many of us eschew clerical dress: things have reached such a pass that it seems a disadvantage to be recognized right off as a Christian minister.

It is not pleasant for a minister to say these things, and I do not imagine it is any more pleasant to listen to them. And I should be very sorry if I conveyed the impression that the popular estimate of clergymen and minis-

ters is regarded by me as justified by fact. I believe that popular disparagement of the Ministry is largely due to ignorance and misrepresentation, that our sins and shortcomings are absurdly exaggerated by our critics. If people knew us better, they might possibly like us more. In many cases they do not give us a fair chance. Many of our critics are ignorant, and some of them are undoubtedly malicious. We do not pretend to perfection, but we are not all humbugs: we do not pretend to genius, but we are not all fools. Many of us have had business experience: some of us have surrendered excellent business prospects in order to serve Christ in His holy Ministry. Even the most jaundiced critic must admit that for any man of average ability the Ministry involves a considerable financial sacrifice. Many of us may think that we know more about human life and human nature than some of the people who say we know nothing at all, and more about hard work than some of the people who arrogate to themselves the title of "working men." There are doubtless some poor specimens among us, and possibly an occasional fool or scoundrel, but it is absurd to brand the whole

Ministry for the follies and vices of a few. We may fairly call attention to the fact that from manses and parsonages have come forth more eminent men than from any other section of society: it is the opposite of the truth to say that the sons of ministers usually turn our badly. But, when we have said all, it is still true that *as a class* we are unpopular, and the success of our self-justification only makes our unpopularity the more remarkable.

But we may further urge that it is only to be expected that God's servants will be unpopular with the class of people who care nothing for the ideals we represent. If we are faithful, we must not be surprised if we are disliked: the ungodly and immoral, if they refuse to heed our warnings and appeals, will naturally resent both them and us. The prophets were unpopular; the early Christians were unpopular; the Lord Himself became unpopular. Of course there is an element of truth in all this; in so far as our unpopularity may be due to our faithfulness, we may well be content to bear it and even to rejoice in it as a species of testimonial. It might be better if with a certain class of people we were more unpopular than we are. But I regret to say that our

unpopularity is not confined to the reprobates; the alarming feature of the situation is that many really decent good-living fellows regard the clerical type as unattractive and even as objectionable. If we were criticized for our virtues we might be glad rather than sorry, but it would be foolish to lay such flattering unction to our soul. So I think we should candidly examine ourselves and ask if, as ministers, we are not exposed to special dangers and often open to some measure of perfectly justifiable criticism.

The first danger of the ministerial life is obviously that which may fairly be called PROFESSIONAL PIETISM, which is liable to degenerate into sheer UNREALITY. It is a dangerous thing to be everlastingly talking about religion, especially if we are expected always to talk in a certain way. We easily become the victims of our own rhetoric: almost unconsciously we slip into the phraseology of our school or sect. We are more or less bound to maintain formal standards of speech and demeanour, both as to what we say and do and as to what we avoid saying and doing. It is inevitable that under such circumstances artificiality should creep in.

This applies to our pulpit ministrations and to our pastoral work as well. Sincerity in word and act is hard to maintain: it takes a great effort to avoid a kind of sanctimonious conventionalism. Often we are tempted to affect sympathies that we do not really feel, and to pretend to be shocked when really we are only amused. Our attitude to our work and to our people easily becomes official.

Sermons and even prayers become exercises in rhetoric in which everything follows a traditional plan. The last thing that many people expect to find in a clergyman is naturalness and frankness. I believe that much of this unreality is due to the prevalence of outworn theologies and the constant use of phrases which once had a meaning, but which have now become mere counters in the region of pious talk. Multitudes of people have religious difficulties: intimate conversation may begin with the weather, but it generally drifts sooner or later to religious topics. Plenty of people are keenly interested in the kind of things we have been discussing here, but they shut up like oysters when a minister approaches, because they think he may be shocked at any suggestion of heterodoxy, and

above all because they do not believe he will deal with difficulties fairly and squarely. Of course this is immensely aggravated in Churches where the minister is either bound by stringent creeds or exposed to heresy hunts in denominational journals and assemblies. I want the day to come when the Ministry will be notable for that loyalty to fact and truth, that readiness to revise judgments, that eagerness for new light, which so nobly characterizes the best scientific men.

The second danger of the ministerial life is that of DOGMATISM—please understand that I am not referring *only* to theology. I have met some very undogmatic theologians who were fearfully dogmatic about everything else. Nor do I want you to think that I deprecate that note of authority which should always be the mark of a man who knows what he is talking about: I bear in mind the ancient saying about the trumpet giving forth an uncertain note. But if it is dangerous to be constantly talking about religion, it is specially dangerous to be constantly talking without fear of contradiction. Schoolmasters as well as preachers are notably exposed to this danger: men of both professions are very

lisble to pose as little popes. We are apt to think it will damage our influence if we acknowledge ignorance or admit doubt. Cromwell's rebuke to the Presbyterian clergy in Scotland applies to us all: "My brethren, I beseech you, by the mercies of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken." I would suggest that it would do us good to read books written from a different point of view from our own, and to get in touch with men whose traditions and judgments are more or less opposed to those we cherish. Of course preaching is not the same thing as lecturing, but I do believe that in preaching we should be scrupulously fair. It is not fair, for example, to be always emphasising the darker and more degenerate aspects of Roman Catholicism, nor is it fair to talk as though only fools believed in the High Anglican theory of "Apostolic Succession," nor is it fair to represent all criticism of Christianity as prompted by ignorance and sin. Let us state our own convictions with modesty and emphasis: if we must attack the views of others, let us be sure we understand them, and not just set up "Aunt Sallies" for the pleasure of knocking them down, as is very commonly done in both political and

religious controversy. Personally, I doubt if controversy does much good, though I believe immensely in frank and friendly discussion in which all parties are equally ready to be convinced of error and to see new aspects of truth.

Thirdly, I think men in the Ministry are peculiarly liable to Egoism. We are constantly in the limelight: after a time we get to like it. Like the Pharisees, we are apt to rejoice unduly in prominence and advertisement, and even to fall into the folly of self-advertisement. We easily become quite unchristian in our desire for the biggest Churches and the front seats at denominational gatherings. In private intercourse we tend to assume pompous airs that the average man regards as sometimes amusing and always irritating. Presuming on our sacred character as Christian ministers, we expect a deference which in our own proper persons we should neither expect nor receive. This is particularly true of what we call the more "successful" type of minister. Of all the virtues that it is our business to preach, I believe that humility is the hardest we have to practise—I mean, of course, genuine humility, not the horrid imitation of it

which some people affect. Priestly arrogance may be a sin to which Roman and High Anglican clerics are specially liable, but I have known some Free Church ministers who could give points to Archbishop Manmix. It will do us good to remember that the only eminence we have a right to claim is eminence in service. The Church does not exist to provide us with jobs and salaries: we exist to provide the Church with men who will serve it in the spirit of Him Who washed His disciples' feet. The Papal motto is one that all of us might make our own—" Servus servorum Dei."

Fourthly, I speak once again of the danger of Laziness. Most of us, I hope, are hard workers; but I gravely fear that some ministers, like many laymen, are not fond of unduly strenuous application. Unlike most laymen, however, a minister can somehow manage on a very small modicum of actual labour. We can preach sermons of a kind with really a minimum of preparation, especially if we possess a glib tongue, a ready command of pious phraseology, and a fair capacity for the retailing of edifying anecdotes. It is further true that there are many "helps" for the lazy minister

in the way of "skeleton outlines" and the like. No one is around to supervise us, and our hours of labour are not regulated by any iron rule, apart from the necessity of presenting ourselves every Sunday at eleven and seven. The really conscientious minister does indeed work harder than the vast majority of laymen, but some ministers are suspected, rightly or wrongly, of doing less. Certainly it is easy to slip into unmethodical ways and to allow time to be frittered away in trivial and unfruitful occupations. We are apt to become spasmodic rather than systematic, to follow the line of least resistance, and generally to fall into dilatory and dilettante habits. Only by rigid self-discipline can this be avoided. Some men like to dodge study: they have a morbid fear of what an Anglican brother calls "spiritual belly-ache" if they spend too much time over Hastings' *Dictionary*, or indeed over any book that is worth while. Hence their ignorance of theology and criticism can only be described as appalling, though this does not prevent them from having very decided views on all kinds of subjects, ranging from the authorship of Deuteronomy to the right method of Baptism. Some men like to dodge pastoral

work — they only do what is absolutely necessary, which is rarely very much. It is superfluous to remind you that a man who is a bad pastor can scarcely expect to win the friendship and affection of his people or to do them very much good: a bad pastor *may* be a good preacher, just as a one-legged man may be an excellent swimmer, but it is exceptional. Most of us are tempted to dodge committee work, much of which is indeed unprofitable, but some of which *must* be done. If we dodge work of this kind, it is unfair to the faithful few who undertake it, and certainly we deprive ourselves of any right to criticize the results.

I believe a specialized Ministry is inevitable. It has its disadvantages and its temptations, but there is no getting away from the fact that efficiency in any department of work is furthered by specialization. Every specialized calling has its limitations and defects, but no one proposes to abolish specialization and revert to the system under which every man was his own butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker. Even the Society of Friends is tending in the direction of recognizing and encouraging a specialized Ministry. But this is all the more reason for guarding as far as we can

against the dangers we recognize. As against the peril of professionalism, let us try in every possible way to keep ourselves fresh and human. It is our duty to take an intelligent interest in everything that interests normal and healthy-minded people—politics, business, art and literature, sports and games, to mix freely with people of all creeds and opinions, and to remember that the Protestant Ministry is nothing if not democratic. Thus we shall be saved also from the peril of dogmatism: we shall learn to take criticism without resentment and to endure contradiction without loss of temper. Especially let us resolve to be scrupulously honest in our thinking and speaking, and not mind if a few people are shocked because we are unconventional. If we are sure of anything worth preaching, let us preach it, and let us offer good reason for the faith that is in us, but do not let us pretend to believe things that really we suspect to be doubtful or false, whether we are *supposed* to believe them or not. As against egoism and laziness, I do not know anything better than to try the ancient recipe of prayer: if we spend a lot of time with Jesus Christ, it ought to take the conceit out of us, and fill us

with a most desperate desire to do something worth while before "the night cometh when no man can work." Indeed, prayer will help us in fighting *all* the dangers I have referred to, if only it is *real* prayer and not merely conventional prayer. No one needs more than we do the injunction to continue unceasingly in prayer.

Finally, let me say that I believe revival must begin in the house of God, and begin with us. In a revived Ministry is the hope of the Church, and in a revived Church is the hope of the world. May the time soon come when the Ministry shall be so intensely real, so unaffectedly humble, so possessed with the passion of service, that we may command the affectionate confidence of all our people and even the ungrudging respect of those who are without — "workmen needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

INDEX

Altruism, 20.
Anselm, 161.
Anthropomorphism, 28.
Arcbelaus, 96.
Arnold, Matthew, 24.
Asceticism, 68.
Augustine, 161.

Bergson, Henri, 15.
Burns, Robert, 150.
Butler, Bishop, 174.

Calvin, 162.
Cerinthus, 94.
Charles, R. H., 17.
Christ-Myth theory, 18.
Christian Science, 31.
Clifford, 7.
Constantine, 66.
Corinthians and Resurrection, 123 f.
Cromwell, 167.

Dale, 158.
Damien, Father, 40.
Darwin, 8.
Deism, 2.
Deissmann, A., 17.
Denney, Dr., 146, 151 f.
Donatists, 67.

Ebionites, 94.
Elsenhus, 15.
Eliot, George, 65.
Erasmus, 68.

Eucken, Rudolph, 15.
Evil, problem of, 30.
Evolution, 8, 9, 15

Forsyth, Principal, 151 f.
Fry, Elizabeth, 40.

Gabriel, angel, 104.
Gray, Rev. A. H., 198.
Grotius, 158.
Guilds, 19.

Hatch, Edwin, 67.
Hegel, 27.
Howard, John, 40.
Hussites, 68.
Huxley, 8.

James, William, 15.
Jerome, 63.
Jewish Law, relation to Christianity, 2.

Kelvin, 15.
Kidd, Benjamin, 83, 187.
Kropotkin, Prince, 187.

Labour Party, 19.
Lecky, 63.
Livingstone, David, 40.
Lodge, Sir Oliver, 15, 175.

Magi, 102 f.
Mill, J. S., 65.

Monnette, Dr., 173.
Montanists, 67.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, 80 f.
Nightingale, Florence, 40.
Novatians, 67.

Omnipotence, meaning of, 34.
Origen, 179.
Oxford Reformers, 68.

Pantocrat, 30.
Psychology, 16.

Quakers, 72.
Quirinius, Governor of Syria, 98.

Rachel, of Ramah, 107.
Ramsay, Sir W. M., 98.
Reformation, 2, 64.
Royce, Josiah, 15, 189.

Saturninus, Sentius, 98.
Socialism, 10, 12.
Spencer, Herbert, 24, 27.
Sunday observance, 73.

Tennyson, 179.
Theodosius, 66.
Tolstoy, 72.
Trade Unionism, 19.

Verbal inspiration, 10.

Waldenses, 68.
Ward, Professor James, 14.
Weissmann, 8.
Wells, H. G., 80.
Wycliffe, 68.

Zacchæus, 155.
Zacharias, 104.

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